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Rural Students' Experiences at the Open University of Tanzania

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**Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

This ethnographic study has been undertaken to address a literature gap relating to rural students' experiences of distance education in developing countries. It gives an account of teaching and learning practices at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT), describes the needs, challenges and coping strategies of students and makes recommendations for improving teaching and support practices in rural areas. An ethnographic approach was used to enable the generation of rich, contextual data from four OUT regional centres. Data generation methods included interviews, observation and document review, while themes were inductively generated through thematic analysis. Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus were used to guide the conduct of the study and interpretation of the findings. The study shows that the OUT does not significantly address the problem of the educational divide between the rural and urban populations of Tanzania. This is mainly due to the urban location of regional centres and to students' inadequate access to relevant teaching and support services such as tutors, library resources and Internet services. The existence of poor infrastructure and the many technological challenges encountered in rural areas further exacerbate the situation. Such limitations may make it difficult for students to develop the intellectual inquiry and critical commentary skills necessary to make informed decisions, and to acquire the competencies expected of graduates of higher education programmes. This study presents rich data based on the immersion of the researcher in the everyday lives of students at the OUT, and proposes a series of recommendations addressing the development of future policy and planning for the university.

Declaration

I, Lulu Mahai Niwagila, certify that this thesis is my original work and has never been published in the same form for the award of a PhD elsewhere.

Signature.....

Date.....31/01/2014

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The successful completion of this thesis is the result of contributions from many people. It is not possible to mention each of them individually, but I am grateful to them all. First and foremost, my gratitude goes primarily to my sponsor, the University of Dar es Salaam (World Bank Project CBI2) whose financial, moral and administrative support enabled me to pursue and complete my PhD study in the United Kingdom.

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Dedication

I dedicate my PhD thesis to my husband Mr James Niwagila and to our children: Daniel and Catherine. This dedication is a symbol of appreciation for their love, care, peace, tolerance and support during my absence which sustained me throughout this academic journey. I thank you and love you with all my heart.

Praise and honour be returned to Almighty God.

Abbreviations

A.C.S.E.E	Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education Examination
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BEST	Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania
BOCODOL	Botswana College of Distance Learning
CCM	Chama Cha Mapinduzi
CEC	Cooperative Education Centre
CHE	Council on Higher Education
C.S.E.E	Certificate of Secondary Education Examination
ESDP	Education Sector Development Programme
GSM	Global System (for) Mobile
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HESLB	Higher Education Students' Loan Board
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IGNOU	Indira Gandhi National Open University
MoEVT	Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
NAMCOL	Namibia College of Open Learning
NCI	National Correspondence Institution
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
OUT	Open University of Tanzania
OUUK	Open University in the United Kingdom
OUM	Open University of Malaysia
SAEU	South African Extension Unit
SARIS	Student Academic Register Information System
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SMS	Short Message Service
SPP	Students' Progress Portfolio
TDHS	Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey
TLSB	Tanzania Library Service Board
UDSM	University of Dar es Salaam
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNISA	University of South Africa
UPE	Universal Primary Education
URT	United Republic of Tanzania

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1 Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

The provision of increased levels of distance education as an alternative to the conventional system seems to be an obvious trajectory in developing countries, particularly where socio-economic and infrastructural challenges are taken into account. However, the effective provision of this mode of education depends on its ability to cater for students' needs within both rural and urban locations. This has been a challenging experience for many countries, especially those in the African continent. This study examined students' experiences of the Open University of Tanzania and argues for the effective provision of academic and non-academic support services to students, regardless of their physical locations. In finding answers to the needs of my study, I used an ethnographic research strategy and employed the theoretical concepts of habitus and field originally developed by Bourdieu (1977, 1990). The concepts of habitus and field were used primarily as reflective research tools to guide the effective conduct of this study and the analysis process: my use of Bourdieu's critical framework to explain issues related to inequality, power and social class in sociology and education is also present here, but is far less foregrounded than the methodological dimension.

This introductory chapter highlights the need to conduct a study on students' experiences at the university level in developing countries such as Tanzania. It is divided into eight sections. Section one starts with an introduction and is followed by contextual information on the study in section two. Section three provides justifications for conducting the study, while section four presents the research aims and purposes. Section five deals with the rationale and significance of the study while sections six and seven deliberate on the concepts used in the study and the methodology used. The final section discusses the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Background Information to the Study

Providing distance education in rural developing countries such as Tanzania is essential, given the need to develop such countries' socio-economic status and to

widen access to education, particularly at the university level. Distance education is a mode of educational provision which has the potential to address these challenges. It has the ability to provide an affordable, quality education to the majority and has the potential to improve the socio-economic status of individuals and their nations (Jenkins, 1989; Keegan, 1990; Kuhanga, 1990; Rumble, 1997; UNESCO, 2002; Daniel, 2007; Krishnan, 2012).

Tanzania is among the countries in the developing world that has begun to tap the potential of distance education at the higher learning level. The acute shortage of access to higher education experienced in Tanzania in the 1980s, and the need to develop a population capable of improving the social and economic development of the country, led to the establishment of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) in 1992 (URT, 1990, 1993).

In responding to Tanzanian societal need, the OUT started offering degree courses in 1994 and beginning with 766 students. Recent statistics indicate that the university has now more than 80,000 students pursuing different degree programmes (OUT, 2013). This is an excellent achievement for such a young university, bringing it into line with far more longstanding universities such as the Open University of the UK whose enrolment exceeds 100,000 per year. However, with such large numbers it is also important to reflect on the availability and accessibility of support services at the OUT, and how these services can be sustained within the provision of undergraduate degree programmes offered to the OUT's many geographically diversified students.

Research conducted in both developed and developing countries indicate that support services are considered to be a core issue in facilitating students' learning (Lockwood, 1995; Sewart, 1993; Tait, 2000; Tait and Mills, 2003; Dzakiria, 2005; 2008; Daniel, 2010; Krishnan, 2012). In using the term 'support services', I include tutor support in addition to library, ICT and other non-academic support services. It is also indicated that the success of students in distance education depends on three factors: support services, logistics/administration and learning materials (Rumble, 2000; Daniel, 2010). However, in many institutions more emphasis is placed on course development than on the other factors (Simpson, 2000, 2002). As a

consequence of this, some students often lose motivation, become isolated, perform poorly and even drop out as they lack the core support that is crucial to their success (Simpson, 2002, 2012; Dzakiria, 2005, 2008; De Hart and Venter, 2013). The OUT has tried to reduce the problem of accessing support among its students by establishing 27 regional centres throughout the country (OUT, 2012a), in the same way that other countries in the developing and developed world have done (Boyd-Barrett, 2000; Choudhry et al, 2008; Latif et al, 2009; Sharma, 2011).

The provision of support services through the use of regional centres is helpful as it enables students to access support close to their living environment. Support services - including academic and non-academic support – can be physically accessed from the regional centres or mediated through various forms of technology including the Internet, print based materials, CD, radio and television.

The advancement of technology, therefore, has made geographical distance less of an issue in the practice of distance education (Macintyre and Macdonald, 2011). However in some parts of the world, particularly in rural developing areas where there is poor infrastructure and a low level of technology, the issue of access to technology remains a real one. Hence, the establishment of centres close to students' environments, the provision of suitable support services, and the opportunity to regularly interact with other students and tutors is imperative.

The good management of regional centres in ensuring the accessibility and availability of academic and non-academic support systems is, therefore, of the utmost importance. Nevertheless, the under-resourced nature of Distance Education Universities, particularly in Africa, acts as a hindrance to the effective provision of support (Asunka, 2008). Given the financial challenge experienced by the OUT (OUT, 2009a, 2011b, 2012a, 2013; Kolimba, Kigadye and Reuben, 2012) – which I will give details of later in the thesis. There is a possibility that the regional centres are failing to provide effective support services, which many students - especially those in the remote rural areas of Tanzania rely upon.

Statistics from the OUT show that the highest enrolment rates and numbers of graduates come from the major cities in Tanzania, rather than from the peripheral

regions of the country (OUT, 2009a, 2011a, 2012a, 2013; Kolimba et al, 2012). This is significant given that 80% of Tanzanians live in rural areas. Moreover, other studies conducted in the country show that urban students in distance higher education face fewer challenges in accessing relevant support services such as information, library services, tutor support and ICT-based resources (Mcharazo and Olden, 2000; Bhalalusesa, 2001; Msuya and Maro, 2002; Mkuchu, 2008; Ng'umbi, 2009).

The low socio-economic status of the population, inadequate technology provision and poor infrastructure make participation in distance higher education more difficult in rural areas (Khan, 2001; Gatsha, 2008; Sugata, 2008; Sahn and Stifel, 2003; Mbukusa, 2009; Aikaeli, 2010; Lephalala and Makoe, 2012). Given that little is documented on the experiences of rural distance education students in the literature of developing countries, I argue for the need to explore more deeply the teaching and learning experiences of rural students and assess the implications of these on issues related to support services.

1.3 Situating the Study: Personal Narrative

1.3.1 Who am I?

I am a female Tanzanian citizen, and come from the Southern part of Sub-Saharan Africa. Originally, my parents came from the southern highlands of Tanzania but educational needs and employment opportunities led them to settle in Dar es Salaam, which meant I had the advantage of growing up in urban area of Tanzania. I am a native Swahili speaker and English is my second language. Coming from a middle class background, I was also able to access considerable educational and socio-economic support from my family, an asset that is not available to the majority of children in Tanzania.

I completed my Undergraduate and Master's degrees at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. My undergraduate study was for a Bachelor of Education degree (Adult Education), while I also hold a Master of Arts degree in Education. My selection of these degree programmes was largely attributable to the educational and career backgrounds of my parents, a phenomenon which Bourdieu (1990) describes

as the family habitus. The family habitus is unconsciously instilled in children and becomes embodied and embedded in their everyday dispositions. My daily hearing, talking, reading and participating in distance and adult education activities and programmes in Tanzania helped me to develop a particular passion for these subjects, and so my academic interest since then has been in distance and adult education.

I am employed at the University of Dar es Salaam, a conventional university. I am attached to the School of Education where I teach courses on adult, community and distance education in Tanzania. I have also had the opportunity to carry out research in adult and distance education, and this has led me to the University of Edinburgh in the UK in pursuit of a PhD. I hope this might also give me the chance to advance my career, and contribute to the educational development of my country.

1.3.2 How I Came to Choose this Topic

I initially developed an interest in the field of distance education during my undergraduate studies at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. Once I had opted for the courses in distance education, I was soon impressed by the significance of distance education in terms of social and economic development. The professor who taught me during my Undergraduate and Master's degrees inspired me with her enthusiasm, encouragement and experiences in distance education, which, in turn, activated my desire to understand distance education in its broader perspective.

My interest in the field of distance education expanded when I chose the topic as my Master's dissertation at the University of Dar es Salaam. I decided to write on institutional support services for distance learners in Tanzania. The dissertation adopted a case study approach to Mwanza and Kagera, the regional centres of the OUT. I followed a qualitative approach and utilised interviews and documentary review methods. As I was limited by time and financial constraints, my study only targeted those distance students who were living in urban areas. The study discovered that the support provided through the regional support centres of the OUT was scarce and students complained about a number of problems: delays in the provision of study materials, a lack of up-to-date materials in the libraries, poor communication with the university, and poor information management systems

(Mahai, 2008). Similar findings were also observed by Bhalalusesa (1998), Mcharazo (1998), Mhehe (2002) and Ng'umbi (2009). The findings from my study and other studies conducted in Tanzania led me to think about the experiences of rural distance students, which then became the focus of my current research.

My interest in this topic has also been influenced by reading the work of Pierre Bourdieu on education and class. I discovered that being born into a middle class family of educated, working parents made me privileged as I had access to education, to good teaching, to learning resources, to financial support and sound parental guidance. I had rural friends at advanced secondary education and university level whose lives were very different from mine. They faced severe financial challenges and had cultural experiences, motivations and beliefs that were completely different from my own.

I remember spending time talking about our backgrounds and these friends described to me unfamiliar experiences of rural areas. They talked about the hardship of life, about walking long distances, and about the poor infrastructure they had to contend with. I found it hard to imagine how they could achieve their educational goals within such an environment. They told me that their education was associated with their desire to transform their families' economic status. Some of these students were the first in their family to be educated and so they shouldered the family's financial responsibilities and were greatly dependent on the loans provided by the government.

I realised that their habitus, being associated with the rural context, was very different from my urban habitus, while, in addition, most of the rural students came from lower class families. However, the conditions within the educational environment forced us all to struggle and adjust to the rules of the game at the University of Dar es Salaam. This is what Bourdieu (1990) calls the structuring of structures, whereby the existing network empowered all of us to struggle for the available social, economic and cultural capital within the education system. Throughout that struggle, we had to re-structure the personal experiences we had acquired from our families and focus on the educational goals that united us all.

Based on my working and academic experiences and my exposure to rural students from conventional educational backgrounds, I wished to explore the ways in which students in a non-conventional university experienced teaching and learning practices in their rural contexts.

1.4 The Aim and Objectives of the Study

1.4.1 Aim of the Study

The study, focused on the rural part of Tanzania and aimed at exploring and describing rural undergraduate students' experiences of teaching and learning at the Open University of Tanzania. It also intended to examine the nature and provision of support services at the OUT, and to work toward recommendations for their improvement.

1.4.2 Objectives of the Study

In pursuit of this aim the objectives of this study were:

1. to explore students' perceptions and experiences of teaching and learning at the Open University of Tanzania
2. using habitus as a guiding concept, to map the challenges that the students faced, and the coping strategies they adopted, in order to pursue distance higher education within the social contexts of rural Tanzania
3. to reach a better understanding of the meaning of 'support' as described by rural students in their social fields
4. to identify the influence of different forms of support services available in the three fields under investigation (the academic field of the OUT, the students' domestic field, and the field of rural Tanzania), and to explore their impact on the teaching and learning processes of rural students
5. based on data collected from students, academic and administrative staff, to make recommendations for the most appropriate and effective methods to support rural students in distance higher education in Tanzania and similar national contexts.

1.5 Rationale and Significance of the Study

The study is significant in that it addresses the educational needs of the nation, contributes to institutional capacity building for distance education, and fills an existing gap in the literature on distance education in developing countries.

Addressing National Need

The relevance of this study is associated with its role in supporting the efforts to improve access to higher education in the rural areas of Tanzania. Tanzania is a developing country involved in the struggle to reduce poverty and improve development in the rural context, where 80% of Tanzanians have their homes (URT, 1998, 2001, 2005; Aikaeli, 2010). It is also relevant to note that Tanzania's rural development strategy of 2001 highlights the need for improvement in agricultural performance and in the provision of essential social services to the people in rural areas. The strategy clearly stipulates that there is also a need to improve human capital, physical infrastructure, demand-driven research and extension services (URT, 2001: 6).

The Tanzanian government considers higher education to be a tool to enable socio-economic development (URT, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2011b; Abel, 2010), recognising it as a source, or means, of producing human resources capable of creating the social and economic development that the country requires (URT, 1998; Msolla, 2007; Abel, 2010). In the OUT's case, documents indicate that it enrolls a larger number of students than the other universities in the country (BEST, 2011, 2012). It is also stated that distance education at the university level in Tanzania emphasises access to and equity of education in both rural and urban areas (Mbwette, 2005). It follows that the OUT, as a mandated distance education institution, could assist considerably in meeting the national goals of reducing poverty and developing an educated and skilled population.

Although the above linkages between educational provision and socio-economic development seem straightforward, realising these goals depends on access to a high quality education through which individuals can fulfil their personal goals, as well as

help meet the socio-economic needs of the nation. This study intends to contribute to the delivery of high quality education by exploring rural students' experiences, thereby observing the challenges they face and the support services they require in order to make recommendations that will significantly improve current practices, particularly in rural Tanzania.

Capacity Building

It is now more than two decades since the establishment of the Open University of Tanzania in 1992 and the instituting of its operations in 1994. This indicates that the OUT is still a young university when compared to universities such as the University of South Africa (established 1946) and the Open University in the United Kingdom (established 1969). However, further investment in capacity building is essential in order to improve quality and widen the market so that students' needs are met. Capacity building is enhanced among other ways through research, staff development and investment in learning infrastructures. Indeed, the findings from this research could be used to improve teaching and learning support practices in rural Tanzania and perhaps improve the reputation of the OUT, both locally and globally.

The Literature Gap

In carrying out an extensive review of the literature on distance education in developing countries I identified an important knowledge gap. Most of the studies conducted in the field of distance education have a western orientation and have less significance for developing countries (Bhalalusesa, 1998). The few existing studies have a tendency to homogenise the students' experiences in terms of location and generally fail to consider whether their geographical locations were rural or urban (Bhalalusesa, 1998; Mhehe, 2002; Srivastava and Reddy, 2007).

Specific studies conducted in Tanzania looked at the experiences from an institutional point of view (Bhalalusesa, 1998; Mahai, 2008; Ng'umbi, 2009), while some reflected on gender (Mhehe, 2002). Again, in these studies students' experiences are often homogenised, neglecting to take into account the fact that

students live and occupy multiple fields at the same time. At least four fields can be distinguished. These include home, community, work and academic institution. Serious consideration should be given, therefore, to students' experiences in these multiple social spaces, especially if we wish to understand students' particular needs, the challenges they face and the coping mechanisms they use.

Since there is little research to date on rural students' experiences in developing countries, many authors have recognised the need for more research in this area (Mcharazo and Olden, 2000; Bhalalusesa, 2001; Msuya and Maro, 2002; Chadibe, 2002; Ukpo, 2006; Amey and Maroba, 2008; Gatsha, 2008; Mbukusa, 2009; Gatsha and Evans, 2010; Lephalala and Makoe, 2012; De Hart and Venter, 2013). The intention of this study is to contribute to this developing literature by exploring the perceptions and experiences of rural students at the OUT and to reflect on the implications of these for university support services.

1.6 Definition of Terms used in this Study

In order to have a common understanding of the terms used in this study, the following section provides a definition of terms as they have been expressed in this study.

Distance Education

This is a system of education in which students, tutors and their institutions are separated in space and time (Keegan, 1990; 1996). Students take up their studies within their home locale and teaching and learning is mainly mediated through print and non-print media, though there may be a certain, generally irregular, amount of face-to-face contact.

Support Services

As I briefly mentioned above, I use the term 'support services' to imply all forms of support that effectively contribute to the education of students. This applies to all forms of non-academic and academic support, including teaching (Melofi, 1998; Simpson, 2002, 2012; Tait, 2003; Dzakaria, 2008; Krishnan, 2012). I recognise that

‘support services’, particularly in conventional universities, are more often associated with primarily non-academic support (Thrope, 2003). The failure to effectively support distance learning students may increase their chances of experiencing stress, of poor performance or even of dropping out. I therefore consider support services as being crucial to the academic success of students, especially in the rural marginalised areas.

Rural Areas

The term ‘rural’ is complex and sometimes difficult to define (Tacoli, 2004). My own definition is drawn specifically from the perspective of a developing country like Tanzania. I can say that rural areas are places which are dominated by the undertaking of agricultural activities, although less so by those of non-farming activities. They are distantly located from urban areas and there are shortages of economic and social resources. The population in these places is usually quite small, while poverty is the main obstacle that most families have to overcome.

Indeed, it is argued that poverty in the rural areas of Tanzania is acute and widespread in comparison to urban areas (Aikaeli, 2010). Rural areas also experience challenges with regard to electricity, health, education, roads, water and ICT infrastructure (URT, 2001; Ellis and Mdoe, 2003; Aikaeli, 2010). This was also emphasized by Shibeshi (2006), who attempted to define ‘rural’ by arguing that:

“Usually, rural people lack adequate access to basic social services because rural areas have low national priority and rural people do not have a political voice, especially the poor (23).”

The students sampled in this study live and study within rural locations, although some live near district centres while others are located in remote rural areas.

Field

I use the term ‘field’, in line with Bourdieu, to describe a social space with structured activities and practices (Bourdieu, 1990). It is a space with rules and conditions in which agents interact and struggle for the possession of capital (Bourdieu and

Wacquant, 1989). A field exists in relation to other social spaces that might differ in rules and practices but which are inter-dependent and inter-related.

I identified three forms of social space for the purpose of this study: namely, the academic, the rural and the domestic fields. The Open University of Tanzania is considered as being the academic field for the purposes of this study. The rural field is, for my purposes, the broad social topology within which students live and interact with fellow students, friends, employers and other members of the community. The domestic field is here viewed as the home, and where most of their learning activities are expected to take place. I also assumed that these three fields are interwoven and interdependent: they all bring particular sets of influences to bear on the learning of the students.

Habitus

‘Habitus’ is another term borrowed from Bourdieu (1977). It is usually conceptualised as referring to generated schemes of thoughts, actions and feelings which individuals acquire after their prolonged interactions with a field and which become the embodied disposition of the individual (Bourdieu, 1977). I use the term to reflect on students’ past experiences within their families and educational context in order to better understand the relevance of these experiences in relations to their current studies in the academic field.

Capital

‘Capital’, for the purposes of this study, is the resource which supports the effective practice of distance education at an individual, institutional and national level. In this study, I consider different forms of capital such as cultural, economic and social – all of which are crucial in helping to facilitate the education of students.

1.7 Methodology for the Study

The study adopted a qualitative research strategy for the purpose of generating rich, contextual and natural data from the four field sites identified at the regional centres of the OUT. An ethnographic research design was used to generate data in the

selected field sites for a period of eight months. This study used observation, interview and documentation as methods for data generation. The interviews conducted in this study were digitally recorded and thus allowing easy access to raw data and transcription.

This main study was made up of forty participants which included students, tutors, regional directors and top officials from the OUT. The sample selection and procedures are described in more detail in Chapter Four. Data were analysed thematically with the help of NVivo (qualitative software).

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis comprises eight chapters. Chapter One has served as an introduction. Chapter Two provides a snapshot of Tanzania, its infrastructure and educational practices and summarizes the origins of distance education in the country. This chapter also provides an in-depth analysis of the Open University of Tanzania (OUT) and its practices.

Chapter Three moves on to review studies related to students' teaching and learning experiences, conceptualises the meaning of support and distance education, and discusses the relevance of support services in students' education. It also casts a critical eye on the functions of the OUT in relation to the roles of universities throughout the world, while conceptualising the standing of rural developing countries and the relevancy of distance education in such a context. Studies on students' experiences in teaching, learning and gender roles are also discussed, as are reflections on methodological perspectives in the reviewed studies on distance education. A discussion of the theoretical framework for the study is also central to this chapter.

Chapter Four is specifically dedicated to methodology. The chapter begins with the readiness of the researcher to conduct this study and also discusses the suitability of the qualitative and ethnographic research design for this study. Issues of accessibility to field sites, participants and procedures for their selection, data generation methods, research rigour and data analysis processes are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present and discuss the findings of this study. Chapter Five focuses on the teaching and learning experiences of rural students at the OUT. It specifically examines habitus and students' current positions in the academic field of the OUT, while modes of teaching, learning and communication are also discussed in detail. Chapter Six discusses the challenges and coping strategies adopted by students in rural areas, while Chapter Seven presents students' perceptions of support services, their need for support, and information on the available support in the rural, domestic and academic fields of the OUT. Opportunities for extending support services to the rural minorities are also identified in this chapter.

Chapter Eight provides a summary of findings and discusses the contribution of Bourdieu's theoretical framework to this study in relation to the logic of practice. The chapter also presents recommendations for improving teaching and support practices in rural areas of Tanzania. These recommendations are divided into two main sections: those relating to improving practices at the institutional level of the OUT, and those which require government intervention. In addition, the limitations of the study and the study's main contributions are discussed, while areas for further research are identified.

As interstices between chapters, I have also included some students' stories in the form of brief snapshots of individuals' 'life worlds'. The aim of these is to illustrate in an immediate and personal way the differences in individual students' experiences of teaching and learning. These snapshots show the differences in location, learning environment, motives for learning, community involvement, family and educational background experienced by these students as they work to attain a higher education.

Life Worlds 1: Lambertha¹ – Regional Centre A

Introduction

Lambertha is a third-year female student taking the Bachelor of Education degree course at the OUT. She lives in a rural district of region A, some 931 kilometres from the headquarters of the OUT at Dar es Salaam. When I first called her, she demanded to know why she had been chosen and not someone else, but after hearing that my request was for a piece of independent research she agreed to take part. When I asked if I could visit her at home, she expressed surprise and wondered how I would get there, given that it was the rainy season and the roads were slippery. I told her I would use public transport and we agreed on the date and time for our meeting.

Travelling to Lambertha's Area

Lambertha's home is a twenty-hour drive from Dar es Salaam. To reach region A, where she lives, took thirteen hours; then I had to take a six-hour bus journey from region A to the district municipal town, where I had a two-day stop before travelling on to Lambertha's home. On the way to her village I had to board an old model Land Rover with seats at the back. There were six of us at the back, all of whom had a lot of baggage. Despite being very tired after the long journey, I was pleased with the warm welcome given to me by Lambertha when I eventually arrived.

Lambertha's Home

Lambertha is a widow with six children. Three of her children were employed as a teacher, lawyer and cashier, and all had families to manage. Of her remaining children, two were still at college and one at secondary school. Lambertha has a maid who helps at home when she is at work. Her house is nice and spacious. The sitting room has a big dining table with chairs, couches and a small shelf with a few books, while a television and radio sit on the small coffee table. In the backyard of her house, Lambertha also keeps pigs and chickens, and just a few metres away from the compound where she lives, there is a big maize and cassava farm which she runs.

¹ Name changed for confidentiality and anonymity purposes

Family Roles and Work Status

Lambertha has been living as a widow since 2002. Since then she has taken care of her children, while also managing her income-generating activities in agriculture and small-scale livestock keeping. She also had a motorbike which she used to shuttle people from one place to another, using this as a source of income. In addition, she was also a secondary school teacher, although at the time of my visit she worked as a coordinator at one of the teachers' resource centres in the area.

Culture of the Area and Her Belief

Although Lambertha was an immigrant from another region, she talked of initiation and circumcision ceremonies as being part of her culture in region A. She complained of the low value placed on education by the people in the area, saying that girls were regarded as a resource for the family and were married off at a very tender age, thus minimising their chances of continuing their education beyond the primary school level.

People in her area were not motivated to take their children to school as was the case in other regions, although Lambertha said that the current directive from the government which requires that every child be enrolled in school could change the situation. Lambertha is a born-again Christian, engaged in serving and preaching about God in her community, and so did not study on Sundays because of her beliefs; however, she often studies after work and on Saturdays.

Family Background

Lambertha comes from a family of five children with an educated father and illiterate mother. At primary school, Lambertha was given significant social and academic support from her parents. She was an elder sister in the family and so played a large role in taking care of the other children, claiming today that her current motivation in continuing with her education at the age of 52 emanates from her lovely family. Upon starting her own family, Lambertha had also to take in her disabled sister and two of her brothers, due to the loss of their father. Because she had to feed them and give them an education, she has lived a very poor life serving her own family and

others, with very little financial assistance. Despite this, it is her great joy that all her siblings live successful lives, and continue to support her in times of need.

Educational Background

Upon completion of her primary school education in the 1970s, Lambertha was employed as a primary school teacher, Grade C. This took place after she had completed a crash programme at one of the Teacher Training Colleges in a course designed to address the acute shortage of primary schools teachers in Tanzania. Teachers who successfully completed the course were called 'Universal Primary Education' (UPE) teachers.

Lambertha then married and started to raise her family, although her struggle to progress through further education did not end at Teachers' College. She joined the non-formal system of education where she studied the secondary education programme as a part-timer. After a year of secondary education (in a compressed two-year programme), she passed the qualifying test which allowed her a further year of secondary education. She then sat the Ordinary National Secondary Education examination, which she completed successfully in 1992.

Lambertha then joined a Teachers' Training College at Grade 'A' level, this being the highest stage of primary teacher education, usually obtained after completion of the secondary education programme. She did not rest there, however, as she then moved on to the 'A to Dip' programme once she had completed her grade A teacher education. 'A to Dip' is a formal system of education which requires students to study a one-year advanced secondary school course, followed by a one-year diploma in teacher education. This differed from the normal route taken which consisted of two years of advanced secondary school education (Form Five-Six), followed by a two year-diploma course. Lambertha completed her studies in 1996 and it was not until 2008 that she decided to enrol for a degree programme at the OUT.

She explained that her previous struggles to secure an education acted as a basis for her present educational goal. As she was used to studying on her own without the aid of teachers and study materials the system of education at the OUT did not come as a

shock to her. She liked studying at night after her midnight prayers, and said her bedroom was the best place to study as she could be on her own.

Lambertha also commented that her choice to study at the OUT was mainly influenced by her current socio-economic commitments and meagre resources. As a government employee and a widow with six children, she had had little opportunity in the past to earn an income. However, I also noted that one of her motives for studying at a higher level was to increase her retirement benefits, which in Tanzania are calculated according to one's level of education.

Her Experiences with the OUT

Lambertha was very happy to be given the opportunity to study for a degree at the OUT, as without it, her future aspirations would not be realised. Indeed, she liked the idea of studying while continuing with other socio-economic activities as this could be achieved without moving away from her home environment. However, she complained bitterly about the distance from her home to the regional centre, and of the unexpected extra costs incurred in the course of her studies.

Lambertha also discussed the challenges she was facing in accessing learning resources in her area. I asked her if she used the Internet to look for study materials but she replied that she had no basic computer skills, although she acknowledged that one of her friends in town sometimes helped her in looking for information from the OUT website and in accessing her university results. Her friend had a laptop and modem, so Lambertha had only to buy a top up voucher in order to access online information.

Lambertha would also have liked to have a study centre close to her living environment, with access to tutors, the Internet and study materials. In fact, she reported that she had problems in accessing printed study materials for some of her courses, and so had to look for materials from different sources. She was also frustrated by the lack of people to study with as most of her university colleagues were distantly located from her and had different areas of specialization.

2 Chapter Two: The country's background, its Infrastructure and the practice of Distance Education in Tanzania

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced my reasons and the broad context for conducting my study at the Open University of Tanzania. In this chapter, I will give a fuller description of the Tanzanian national context. I will specifically focus on Tanzania's background, its size, population and politics. I will also describe the infrastructural status of the country, the main focus of which will be on roads, electricity and ICT. I will discuss the educational practices of the country and provide a broad overview of the history of distance education in Tanzania and of the teaching and learning practices at the OUT. The chapter ends with a discussion on the different types of support services provided to students at the OUT.

2.2 Tanzania: Background

Country Area and Population

Tanzania covers 945,087 sq. km, an area three times larger than the United Kingdom. It is a developing country located in sub-Saharan Africa and is bordered by Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, Zambia, Rwanda, Malawi and Mozambique. The total population of the country is estimated to be 44.9 million (URT, 2013) with the majority of the population (80%) living in the rural areas (Ellis and Mdoe, 2003; Aikaeli, 2010).

Tanzania has 26 administrative regions; Dodoma is the capital city, while Dar es Salaam is the country's main commercial city. The country is home to 120 ethnic groups, and its main language is Swahili, while English is mainly used as an official language (URT, 2011a).

Politics

Tanzania emerged from the unification of the two sovereign states, Tanganyika and Zanzibar; Tanganyika became independent in December, 1961, while Zanzibar became independent in December, 1963. The unification took place in April, 1964 when the Republic of Tanzania was formed (URT, 2011a). The country is a multi-

party state and has about 18 political parties (URT, 2011a) though it is dominated by the ruling political party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) which has now been in power for more than thirty years. CCM had its origins in the leftist politics of African socialism, but is now more oriented to a set of neo-liberal economic agendas.

The policies of the CCM are expressed in the Tanzania Development Vision, 2025, which focuses on the following needs and provisions: a high quality livelihood for all Tanzanians; a well-educated society; peace, stability and unity; good governance and rule of law; and a strong and competitive economy (URT, 1998). Education is seen as a tool for social and economic development and is considered as being the primary means for attaining such a vision for Tanzania by 2025.

It is believed that education will help to transform the lives of Tanzanians and create a highly-skilled, knowledgeable community to help develop the nation (URT, 1998). The attempt to expand primary and secondary education, the building of new schools and classrooms, the recruitment of new teachers, the widening access to teacher education, and an increase in government spending on education are among the many steps taken by the government of CCM to improve the Tanzanians' quality of life and their level of education (ESDP, 2010, 2012). However, the efforts taken to expand the country's access to education have been more concentrated on the primary and secondary level than at the university level (BEST, 2011, 2012).

Economy

Tanzania, like other countries in the developing world, is dependent on agriculture, which contributes more than 25% of the country's GDP (IFAD, 2010). In fact, agriculture contributes about 85% of the country's exports and employs more than 70% of the Tanzanian workforce. The major cash crops grown in the country include tea, tobacco, sisal, coffee, cashew nuts, pyrethrum and cotton. Other sectors such as industry, construction, mining and fishing also contribute to the development of the country's economy, while many tourists are attracted to Mt. Kilimanjaro, the game reserves, and to the beautiful natural beaches and national parks.

Despite being endowed with natural resources, Tanzania is still challenged by acute poverty (Aikaeli, 2010). Evidence suggests that about 38% of the total population are estimated to live below the poverty line of less than one US dollar per day, and that the majority of these people live in rural Tanzania (URT, 2009).

2.3 Infrastructure

It is argued that the infrastructural development of any country is a key instrument towards its social and economic development (Carruthers et al, 2009; Kim et al, 2010; URT, 2011b). Education as a social component and a tool for economic development also depends on the proper layout of that country's physical and technological infrastructure. Therefore, levels of access to the Internet, telephone lines and roads are of vital importance to distance education and its communication modes. This section focuses on those infrastructural elements which have a significant influence on the learning outcomes of rural distance students in Tanzania: namely, electricity, ICT and transport.

Electricity

Tanzania's main source of electricity is hydro-electric power. However, its sustainability depends on climatic conditions which in Tanzania are often unstable (World Bank, 2010a; URT, 2011a). Electricity is also unequally distributed in Tanzania. For example, the Tanzania's Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS) (URT, 2011c) shows that 45% of the total Tanzanian mainland has access to electricity, although only 3% of the rural mainland has access to it.

Moreover, the TDHS report also reveals that 91.2% of the rural population depend on paraffin and kerosene for lighting, while 91.8% still use firewood for cooking. From this information we can see that electricity in Tanzania is not, therefore, a social resource which is available to all. This obviously has an effect on the rural distance students of Tanzania. Since they require reliable access to ICT facilities, they might be required to invest in solar power or generators, where the national grid cannot provide a regular, uninterrupted supply of electricity. Given the economic

status of the people in developing countries such as Tanzania, this may be costly and only possible for a few.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Tanzania

The development of ICT in Tanzania is a priority of the nation (URT, 2003). This is because ICT facilitates connection between individuals, improves relations among communities and provides access to various forms of economic resource (Kim et al, 2010). Because of these advantages, Tanzania has recently expanded its Internet and telecommunication services. In fact, just over a decade ago the country had only one Internet provider, but now it has at least six providers (Jijun, 2009).

In an attempt to expand Internet accessibility throughout the country, the government of Tanzania received a loan of 70 million dollars from the Chinese government (Jijun, 2009). This money is being used to develop the fibre optic network and is still on-going. Successful completion of this project is hoped to facilitate easy access to ICT-based support systems among the rural students of the country. It will also improve communication and interaction which are critical factors in facilitating students' education at a distance. Currently, access to Internet services is mainly urban-based and is expensive (Furuholt and Kristiansen, 2007; World Bank, 2010a; URT, 2011b; Mahai, 2012).

Studies indicate that only 65% of Tanzanians have access to mobile phones and that they live near Global System Mobile (GSM) signals (World Bank, 2010a). Therefore, urban people have more access to mobile phone services than the people living in remote rural areas.

Roads

Road transport is one of the major means of transport in Tanzania (Mporogomi, 2001). It is used by the majority of Tanzanians, particularly in commuting between regions. This was one of my observations during the conduct of field work in the four sampled regional centres of the OUT. While there, I was entirely dependent on roads to move between urban and rural areas, most of which were rough and very slippery during the rainy season.

Travelling by road is comparatively cheap when compared to air and railway travel, and is more accessible than any other mode of transport in Tanzania. For example, the high cost of air travel restricts the majority from accessing the service. Likewise, railway and waterway transportation are both limited by the geographical terrain of the country. Therefore, road transportation, and above all the use of bus services, continues to be the leading means of transport in both rural and urban areas (Mporogomi, 2001).

While many Tanzanians continue to depend on bus routes for transportation, the country itself has a very poor road infrastructure. Only 6,700 km of roads, out of 82,472 km, are consistently passable in Tanzania (URT, 2011a). Only a small proportion of roads are tarmacked and these are mainly situated in cities and town centres, not rural areas (URT, 2011a). Moreover, only 28% of rural dwellers live within 2 kilometres of an all-weather road (Ter-Minassian et al, 2008). This is a challenge to the many Tanzanians who live in rural areas, and whose district and village roads are known to be poor (Mporogomi, 2001).

My analysis of electricity, ICT and road infrastructures discussed in this section indicates that Tanzania is still lagging behind in its infrastructural development, although some other countries in sub-Saharan Africa have the same problem (Carruthers et al, 2009; IFAD, 2010). The poor infrastructure in Tanzania poses challenges to those educators who wish to implement effective teaching and learning strategies among distance students in the country, particularly regarding the use of media, technology support and communication systems. Indeed, given the present infrastructural challenges the country faces, it is questionable whether the OUT can effectively provide distance education courses at all to its rural students.

2.4 Education in Tanzania

The Educational System

The provision of education at all levels in Tanzania is the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Tanzania (MoEVT) (ESDP, 2008). The conduct of educational practices in this ministry is guided by the educational

policy of 1995. However, there has been no recent review of this policy and it is now outdated, although the process of preparing a new policy to suit the needs of this generation is underway. The existing educational policy shows that the current education system in Tanzania follows the 2-7-4-2-3+ model (URT, 1995).

The first two years of this system is pre-primary education which enrolls children at the ages of five and six. The following seven years constitute primary education which is compulsory for all children between the ages of seven to thirteen. Students who complete primary education may then enrol on secondary education programmes where they can study for four years, or they may decide to enrol on other courses such as vocational studies.

Students completing ordinary level secondary education with a minimum of three credits then have the opportunity to enrol to Advanced Secondary Education. This takes two years after which they can be enrolled into university for higher education. Education at the university is undertaken between three to five years, depending on the nature of degree programme selected by individual students. For example, a degree in medicine takes five years followed by a one-year internship, unlike a law degree which takes four years. Individuals can also access other forms of education such as tertiary and vocational education at any level.

In Tanzania, students who complete tertiary and university level courses expect to be employed in government offices or in private companies, although some will become self-employed. However, as Msolla (2007) states,

“There is an acute shortage of qualified workforce such as teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers and technicians” (10).

There is still significant work to be done, therefore, in providing sufficient higher education through both conventional and distance education modes within Tanzanian universities.

Language of Instruction

Tanzania uses two languages of instruction in teaching at the primary and secondary school level. However, there are differences between the use of these two languages

at the lower levels. For example, the Swahili language is used as a mode of instruction in public primary schools, while English is taken as a subject. This is not the case in private primary schools in the country, where Swahili is considered to be one of the subjects.

English then is used as a mode of instruction in secondary schools, in colleges and at the university level. The transition from Swahili to English is particularly difficult for those students who studied at the public primary schools as in secondary school they have to struggle with the understanding of content matter, as well as the change of language. Such problems often lead to student failure. If these difficulties persist up to university level they can result in on-going problems in comprehension and communication.

I indicated in Chapter Two that Swahili is the national language and is used by most Tanzanians in their day-to-day lives. This means that English is seen as a second language by the majority of students at all levels of education. It must be acknowledged, therefore, that teaching students in English, which is the second or third language in Tanzania, is a big challenge. The literature suggests that,

“If students are to develop ability to think critically, they must grasp what that entails, they must be given guidance as to how they should practice it and they must be given time to develop their proficiency in it” (Cosgrove, 2011: 355).

The development of cognitive abilities and critical thinking as argued by Cosgrove depends on the learning environment, proficiency in the language, the role and ability of the teachers, and the nature of the assessment used. Therefore, effective support mechanisms should be in place to facilitate students’ understanding of content, as well as to improve their mastery of written and spoken language skills.

2.4.1 Higher Education in Tanzania

The higher education sector in Tanzania operates under the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and is based on the Higher Education policy of 1999. The main emphasis in this policy is on the education of professionals who have the ability to work in different sectors within and outside the country. The policy also focuses

on the expansion of higher education in its different forms, including distance education. However it does not indicate how distance education at the university level should be developed and managed. The absence of a clear policy to guide the practices of distance education within Tanzania acts as an impediment to its effective implementation. It should be understood that this mode of learning has greater potential to widen higher education throughout Tanzania than any other educational system in the country (BEST, 2011, 2012; Mbwette and Kazungu, 2012).

My review of higher education policy in Tanzania indicates that more emphasis is placed on the conduct and implementation of the conventional system of education. This limits the scope of policy, as the conventional system can only accommodate a certain number of students and cannot be offered to students within their home locations (Keegan, 1990; UNESCO, 2002; Daniel, 2007). It is, therefore, difficult to comment constructively on the relevance of this policy with regard to the practice of distance higher education in Tanzania.

The Need to Expand Higher Education in Tanzania

The need to expand higher education in Tanzania was perhaps more relevant in the 1980s as there was huge demand for it at that time. During that period, Tanzania had only two public universities, and was insufficient to address the needs of higher education in the country. The universities involved were the University of Dar es Salaam and the Sokoine University of Agriculture (Mmari, 1999; Msolwa 2007).

The acute need for higher education encouraged the country's leaders to reflect on alternative modes that could help to widen access. This led to the decision to establish the first Distance Education University in the early 1990s (URT, 1990). This was at a time when investors were being invited to establish private universities in Tanzania (URT, 1990). To date, Tanzania has more than 40 public and private universities and university colleges (ESDP, 2012). Despite the country's success in the expansion of education, however, statistics indicate that there is still a need for a further widening of access to higher education in the country (BEST, 2011, 2012). Table 1 below shows the increasing enrolment trend at the university level in Tanzania.

Year	Female	Male	Total
2005/2006	13,213	27,780	40,993
2006/2007	16,358	29,143	45,501
2007/2008	23,942	52,230	76,172
2008/2009	31,012	64,513	95,525
2009/2010	42,239	76,712	118,951
2010/2011	51,860	87,778	139,638
2011/2012	60,592	105,892	166,484

Source: Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania (BEST) (2011, 2012)

Table 1: University enrolment trends from 2005/06 to 2011/12 (Public and Private Universities and University Colleges in Tanzania)

The table above reveals the increasing enrolment figures at the university level in Tanzania. While it is encouraging to see the number of female students increasing on an annual basis, more effort is still required in order to attain equity in accessing university education between male and female students. However, this is not a primary focus of the current study. Perhaps of greater relevance to this research is the challenge represented by the increase in numbers and the burden these are likely to place on the human, physical and financial resources of the universities.

Studies in Tanzania show that higher education is still being challenged by issues of access, equity, the provision of quality education, and inadequacy in human, financial and physical resources (Msolwa, 2007; Abel, 2010; ESDP, 2010; Kolimba et al, 2012). If these challenges are not addressed effectively, they may well affect the quality of educational provision, reduce the scope of knowledge among individual students, and hinder the delivery of the highly educated populace that the universities are expected to achieve.

The issues of equity and access to education that have been hinted at here are also evident in the national education statistics. For example, statistics indicate that the

primary education sector enrolls 72% of all those being educated in the entire education sector, whereas the ordinary secondary education sector enrolls 36.6% (NER); the advanced secondary education sector enrolls only 2.7% (NER); and the Higher Education sector enrolls only 1% (BEST, 2011; ESDP, 2012). It should be noted that enrolment in the Higher Education sector depends on the output of the advanced secondary education and Diploma programmes.

The figures presented above indicate how uneven the distribution is in terms of access to education at all levels. Factors such as performance, the readiness to study, and national strategies to widen access to education may have influenced such differences. Therefore, widening access to secondary and university education through different systems of education such as distance education are of particular importance to a developing country such as Tanzania.

2.4.2 The History of Distance Education in Tanzania

The practice of distance education in Tanzania began even before the granting of independence to the country. Before independence, distance education was provided by the British Tutorial College, the Rapid Results College, Wolsely Hall and the International Correspondence School (URT, 1990; Zindi and Aucoin, 1994). However, the education provided by these institutions did not really meet the national needs that emerged after independence was declared in 1961, and it was not accessible enough to the wider Tanzanian population.

In that period, Tanzania had a number of urgent needs: the education of its people, professional development, a skilled labour force and the training of policy translators and implementers (URT, 1990). The task of providing distance education was left to the Cooperative Education Centre (CEC) and the National Correspondence Institution (NCI) (URT, 1990), both of which were established after independence.

The Cooperative Education Centre (CEC) and the National Correspondence Institution (NCI)

The CEC came under the auspices of Cooperative Union of Tanzania, while the NCI was managed by the Institute of Adult Education. These two institutions were

established for the purpose of providing correspondence education. Their courses were based on print media and the printed materials were sent to students through the post. However, other modes of study such as study circles, radio programmes, seminars, correspondence tuition, telephone and even pre-arranged face-to-face sessions were also used to facilitate the learning of students (Kuhanga, 1990; URT, 1990; Zindi and Aucoin, 1994).

Given the continuation of these, or similar, modes of teaching in contemporary Tanzanian distance education, we would do well to draw lessons from the shortcomings of these two institutions. For example, the over-dependency on donor support such as that received from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) in running programmes, and the lack of suitable sustainability planning resulted in the eventual demise of the CEC and NCI (Kuhanga, 1990).

Other factors such as a high dropout rate, a shortage of trained staff, the lack of evaluation and difficulties encountered in the production of correspondence materials were also factors that limited their effectiveness (URT, 1990). Despite these failings, donor dependency syndrome and the inadequacy of sustainable plans are still factors that currently affect the effective practice of distance education in Tanzania (Komba, 2009).

Efforts to Introduce Distance Education at the University Level in Tanzania

The attempt to introduce higher education through distance education in Tanzania started with the Anglo Media team (1979) and the Presidential Commission on Education in the 1980s. These two teams proposed the establishment of a correspondence institute in Tanzania (URT, 1990; OUT, 2011b), although nothing was established. Further efforts were initiated through the Commonwealth Education Minister's Conference of 1987 in Kenya and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference in Vancouver, Canada in 1987. The two conferences discussed the possibility of establishing a Distance Education College or University in each of the Commonwealth countries, of which Tanzania is a member. These conferences resulted in the foundation of the Commonwealth of Learning, and

Tanzania actively participated in the signing of its Memorandum of Understanding in 1988 (URT, 1990).

The lessons that were learned from the experiences of the Anglo Media team, the PEC, the Commonwealth Conferences and other institutions such as the CEC and the NCI all contributed towards the move to establish the OUT in 1992. The OUT was established as a result of research into alternative modes of education that would provide affordable quality education to the majority of Tanzanians. These efforts were initiated by the Ministry of Education under the guidance of the Tanzanian government (Kuhanga, 1990; URT, 1990). The OUT officially opened as a fully-fledged university in January 1994.

2.5 The Open University of Tanzania and its Practices

The OUT is mandated to provide distance education at the higher level throughout the country. The university has five faculties (Education, Arts and Social Sciences, Science and Technology, Environmental Studies and Law) and two institutes (the Institute of Educational Technology and the Institute of Continuing Education). It has also appointed a Director of Research and has access to Postgraduate Studies and Consultancy (OUT, 2011c). Its operations are based in the established regional centres that are widely spread throughout Tanzania. This has been advantageous to the country as it has facilitated the enrolment of many students, despite their geographical locations.

2.5.1 Entry Qualifications and Degree Programmes

Entrance to the various degree programmes at the OUT relies on the cut-off point set by the OUT. However, the minimum entry qualification is five principal passes in the Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (C.S.E.E.), or in the East African Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level), or its equivalent. The addition of two principal level passes in appropriate subjects at the Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (A.C.S.E.E.), or in a two year diploma course is also required (OUT, 2012b). Those with insufficient qualifications can also enrol at the university by participating in a one-year foundation course (OUT, 2012b). The

range of entry qualifications observed at the OUT is aimed at fulfilling the democratic agenda of widening access to education to the majority of the country's people.

These entry qualifications give the enrolled students access to both degree and non-degree programmes. My focus is directed toward undergraduate students at the OUT. In fact eighteen undergraduate degree programmes are offered by the OUT's five faculties (OUT, 2011b). Upon enrolment, students are expected to finish their degrees within six to eight years of part-time study.

2.5.2 Costs of Programmes

The cost of education at the OUT varies according to the nature of the degree programme studied, with fees ranging from 2,160,000 (TZS1000) to 3,600,000 (TZS1667) Tanzanian shillings for an entire degree programme (OUT, 2012b). However, it is important to bear in mind that the stated costs at the OUT are for tuition fees only. Other hidden costs such as transport and accommodation (see Chapter Six) incurred by individual students are not explicitly attributable to the OUT.

2.5.3 Enrolment Trends and Student-Staff Ratio

Enrolment Trends

The OUT is experiencing an increase in the number of students enrolling in its different courses. The distribution of students is as follows: 43,802 (undergraduate), 13,442 (postgraduate) and 23,347 (non-degree programmes) (OUT, 2013: V). Statistics from 1999 to 2012 also indicate that 6,075 students have graduated from non-degree programmes, 6,655 from undergraduate programmes and 1,558 students from postgraduate programmes (OUT, 2012a: 30). The table below shows the enrolment trend of undergraduate students only, from 1994-2012.

Year	Enrolled Students		Total
	Male	Female	
1994	699	67	766
1995	668	70	738
1996	999	102	1101
1997	669	86	755
1998	648	99	747
1999	552	67	619
2000	551	124	675
2001	984	225	1209
2002	1040	300	1340
2003	1177	390	1567
2004	1419	501	1920
2005	2003	689	2692
2006	2432	1035	3467
2007	4226	1442	5668
2007/2008	1842	723	2565
2008/2009	2566	940	3506
2009/2010	1709	649	2358
2010/2011	2507	1242	3749
2011/2012	2520	1164	3684
2012/2013	3107	1569	4676

Source: OUT (2012a: 6/7; 2013)

Table 2: Undergraduate enrolments to the OUT according to gender

Table 2 above shows substantial growth in the number of students enrolling for various degree programmes at the OUT since its establishment. The trend of female enrolment is increasing but at a fluctuating rate, although the number is still less than 50% of the total male enrolment rate. The variation or fluctuation in female numbers may be influenced by cultural inhibitions or by their lower access to higher education.

Table 2 also indicates that there are fluctuating trends in the year-on-year numbers in both male and female enrolment. For example, in 2007, the university enrolled more than 5,000 students, while in the following year the numbers were less than half that. Fluctuating trends such as these might be caused by low completion rates and poor performance in secondary schools, or sometimes by a lack of understanding of the practices and potentials of distance education. Therefore, strategies such as awareness creation, advocacy and an improvement in performance at the lower level may be required in order to widen access to education to the majority of Tanzanians.

Student – Staff Ratio

The general increase in enrolment in degree and non-degree programmes at the OUT necessitates concurrent increase in human resources, particularly of tutors who can contribute to the academic well-being of students. In responding to the need for more tutors, the OUT has continued to increase the employment of academic staff. For example, statistics indicate that there were only five full-time academic staff in 1994 but in the period 2010-2012 there were more than 300 (OUT, 2011b, 2012a; 2013).

The ratio between students and tutors is estimated to be 1:104 (OUT, 2011b). This is not a particularly large number of students to manage given the role that modern technology is expected to play in distance education. However, the current low level of technological provision, the high costs of equipment and the low expertise apparent in the development of cutting edge technology are among the factors which act as barriers (Sife, Lwoga and Sanga, 2007; Komba, 2009; N’gumbi, 2009; Nihuka, 2011; Mahai, 2012). The situation in Tanzania forces tutors and other staff to fall

back on traditional face-to-face sessions. This, in turn, puts more pressure on tutors and eventually causes a shortfall in their capacity to offer support, making fully supported study in turn far more difficult for students to access (OUT, 2009a, 2011b, 2012a).

2.5.4 Teaching and Assessment at the OUT

Teaching

Teaching at the OUT is media-based, and depends mainly on printed study materials. The OUT conducts annual face-to-face sessions with students, who generally have to rely on these printed self-taught study materials to progress their education. In addition, the OUT's Institute of Educational Technology has created an online learning environment (using Moodle) within the institution and students can now use the OUT website to access administrative information and their student email accounts (OUT, 2010b). However, given the problem of distribution of access to Internet connectivity in the country which I have already highlighted, access to these online resources is mainly restricted to urban-based students.

Assessment

Assessment procedures at the OUT include continuous assessment and a final examination. Under continuous assessment, students are expected to sit a single test that constitutes 30% of the final assessment, while the main university examination constitutes the other 70%. The distribution of marks in terms of tests and examinations indicate that the use of assignments is not part of assessment procedures at the OUT. This is contrary to the mode proposed during the establishment of the university which included two tests, two assignments and an annual examination (Mhehe, 2002). The previous mode of assessment included 25% for the two timed tests, 15% for the two assignments, while 60% was allocated to the annual examination.

The presence of assignments in students' learning is argued to be critical in a number of ways: assignments enable students to learn and familiarise themselves with course subjects; they encourage constant learning, which is important for intellectual

development; they improve students' ability to argue and use language; they provide written feedback and they also help to create a connection with their teachers (Thrope, 1987, 1998, 2000; Bhalalusesa, 2006). Given the fact that the mode of teaching and learning at the OUT presented in the sections above does not appear to encourage students to interact and share resources, there is a danger of students embarking on activities that are too shallow and not educationally challenging enough, which might, in turn, affect the quality of graduates coming from the OUT.

2.5.5 Funding at the Open University of Tanzania

The funding of public institutions in Tanzania is largely dependent on the government (Msolla, 2007; Ishengoma, 2008; Kolimba et al, 2012). As the OUT is a public university it also depends on the same source. The budget for the education sector over the past five years has ranged between 17% - 19% of the total budget. Of this, the higher education sector received between 22% - 33% of the total budget allocated to education in the country (ESDP, 2008). This amount appears not to be enough to meet the administrative and academic needs of public institutions such as the OUT.

The following table shows the funds requested and funds received by the OUT from the government from 1994 - 2012.

Financial Year	Requested budget (In Tshs ‘000’)	Approved Budget (in Tshs, ‘000)	%Approved
1994/1995	530,000	190,000	35.8
1995/1996	1,508,607	538,805	35.7
1996/1997	2,493,056	650,000	26.1
1997/1998	2,997,016	660,348	22.0
1998/1999	2,248,546	1,140,000	50.7
1999/2000	2,361,437	1,640,335	69.5
2000/2001	3,354,888	2,268,907	67.6
2001/2002	3,918,442	2,479,622	63.3
2002/2003	3,259,146	2,579,438	79.1
2003/2004	2,765,549	1,723,954	62.3
2004/2005	3,849,679	1,737,293	45.1
2005/2006	4,262,314	2,678,752	62.8
2006/2007	6,872,210	4,006,751	58.3
2007/2008	7,606,520	5,776,920	75.9
2008/2009	11,959,263	5,752,209	48.1
2009/2010	11,909,209	9,468,887	81.0
2010/2011	12,400,000	11,578,697	93.4
2011/2012	24,490,491	11,197,571	45.7
2012/2013	25,000,000	12,082,715	48.3

Source: OUT (2012a: 55; 2013: 66)

Table 3: The OUT- Government financial trend from 1994-2012

Table 3 above shows the fluctuating trend in the funds provided to the OUT by the government. It also demonstrates that the OUT regularly receives less money than it

requests, thus confirming views regarding the underfunding of higher education in Tanzania documented in various studies (Msolla, 2007; Ishengoma, 2008; ESDP, 2010, 2012; Kolimba et al, 2012; OUT, 2011a, 2012a, 2013). The failure of government to provide the OUT with adequate funds is likely to have serious implications in terms of decision-making and the allocation of resources, now, and in the future.

However, in trying to fill the financial gap, the OUT utilises other sources of funding such as donor funds, research grants, income-generating projects and students' tuition fees. These sources provide less than 20% of the funds required by the OUT and thus the university has to depend solely on government funding to ensure the smooth running of administrative and academic activities (OUT, 2011a: 54, 2012a: 61).

2.5.6 Support Practices at the OUT

Support services at the OUT include regional centres, study centres, online support, library support, print material support and tutor support.

Regional Centres

The OUT has 27 regional centres which are intended to provide relevant support services close to students' homes. These regional centres have a remit to provide the following services: tutoring and counselling; teaching and learning facilities; the organisation of public lectures; discussion groups, workshops and seminars; the dissemination of information to attract new students; the co-ordination of activities with resource centres and study centres; and the organization of training for part-time tutors (OUT, 2012a: 67).

Study Centres

The University has about 69 study centres which operate under the umbrella of the regional centres (OUT, 2012b). These centres are expected to serve as focal points for project work and interaction, or as classrooms (for tutorials and demonstrations),

libraries, and laboratories (OUT, 1990, 1993). Unfortunately the centres are expected to be established by students themselves without any initial support from the OUT.

Tutor Support, Printed Study Materials and Library Support

The OUT employs more than 300 tutors who are situated at the headquarters and at regional centres (OUT, 2012a). These tutors are expected to play a significant role in providing academic and non-academic support to their students as well as play a significant role in teaching, supporting and sustaining students in their programmes of study (Beaudoin, 1990; Lentell, 2003; Modesto and Tau, 2009).

The OUT produces printed study materials and distributes them to the students. These materials have been developed by course experts and checked by the university to ensure their quality (Mhehe, 2002). It also provides library support at the OUT headquarters and in regional centres, through collaboration with the Tanzania Library Services Board (TLSB). This enables students to access these services in the regions as TLSB is located all over the country.

Online Support

The Open University of Tanzania uses Moodle (Learning Management System) to facilitate the education of its students (Nihuka, 2011). The purpose in introducing Moodle was to enable the smooth delivery of courses and to assist students in accessing educational resources. The system also provides access to a discussion platform which enables students to share their opinions on academic problems with tutors and fellow students. To facilitate the process, the University has established four computer laboratories at its headquarters, and has supplied computers to almost all of the regional centres (Mbvette, 2009; Nihuka, 2011). The technology also functions administratively, allowing students to register for courses, access course outlines and get their examination results through the Student Academic Register Information System (SARIS) (Nihuka, 2011).

Face-to-face Support

Students are provided with opportunities for face-to-face support sessions alongside these print-based and technology-enabled mechanisms. The literature on provision of face-to-face contact in distance education highlights a number of advantages: they direct students' educational activities; they monitor students' progress; they facilitate discussions and offer clarification on difficult areas in courses; they provide specialized attention to those learners who are struggling, particularly to those with low levels of self-motivation; and they also give students an opportunity to share their social and academic experiences (Moore, 1989; Chadibe, 2002; Simpson, 2002, 2012; Chandran, 2011). There is a need, therefore, to ensure that students have access to those centres in which the face-to-face support sessions are provided.

2.5.7 Conclusion

Although the OUT appears to have a wide range of support services on offer to students, it is probable that a number of these services are limited, inaccessible, and unavailable in some areas, particularly in the rural areas. For example, gaining access to core support systems such as subject tutor support and library facilities at headquarters is impossible for the large majority of rural students. Accessing such resources requires an investment of time, travel and money which is not feasible for many in this group. There is convincing evidence in the literature that those OUT students who live in urban areas have an advantage in accessing relevant learning resources compared to their rural counterparts (Mcharazo and Olden, 2000; Bhalalusesa, 2001; Msuya and Maro, 2002; Mkuchu, 2008; Ng'umbi, 2009).

Similar challenges in facilitating the education of rural students are also documented in countries such as South Africa (Chadibe, 2002; Ngengebule, 2008; Lephalala and Makoe, 2012), Namibia (2008), Malaysia (Lim et al, 2009), India (Kumar et al, 2011) and Zimbabwe (Kangai et al, 2011), among others. By studying rural students' experiences within their home locations, this study intends to provide a rich picture of the problems and difficulties that students face, and then work towards a set of recommendations that will improve support and teaching practices in Tanzanian

distance education, and in those other areas of the developing world which face similar problems.

Life worlds 2: Abel - Regional Centre B

Introduction

Abel was one of the fourth year students in regional centre B, aged between 20-29 years, who was studying for a Bachelor of Science (Education) degree. He had been recently married when I met him in January, 2011. Abel lived 568 kilometres from the headquarters of the OUT, and it took me nine hours to travel to Abel's regional centre. Then, having slept in town overnight, it took me another five hours of bus travel to reach his district town. Although the journey was long and tiresome, Abel, a humble looking secondary school teacher, was waiting eagerly for me on my arrival, and had, in fact, been texting me regularly to check on my whereabouts. I eventually reached Abel's home, which was situated within a school compound, after a final 35-minute journey on a hired motor cycle.

His Home

Abel has a three bedroom house. His sitting room is small with a paired set of couches and a radio. There is a small coffee table in the sitting room with a few books on top. Abel's home is plastered with white cement and was surrounded by coconut trees, one of the main crops in region B (see the picture below). I asked Abel if he was also involved with the cultivation of the crops but he said he was not.



Figure 1: Abel's home in one of the rural districts in region B

I inquired about the culture of the people in his area. He replied that although he was not originally from this area, he was familiar with the local language. The people who lived in the area were cooperative, he said, and they liked festivals. They practiced various traditional ceremonies and village activities. Abel said that if one did not participate could be excluded from social activities. Being a Christian, Abel had to accustom himself with the Muslim culture of the area.

Apart from his teaching, Abel was not involved in any of the economic activities of the area. Moreover, he had no access to electricity from the national grid, and instead used local rural electricity to gain access to a radio connection and to charge his mobile phone battery. In the evening, he used a kerosene lamp to light his house. The location of his village meant that Abel's radio could only access reception from nearby neighbouring countries, rather than from his own country, and he was therefore automatically excluded from the radio announcements that came from the regional centre.

Abel also told me that he helped his wife at the weekends in cleaning the house and washing clothes, as she was expecting their first child. During the evening, Abel used his school office to read and study in as the school had a connection to solar power. However, he could not study there for too long as his wife was scared to be alone in the dark.

His Work

Abel is a government employee, and is the only teacher in the school alongside the headmaster. This village secondary school has three hundred students taking arts and science subjects, with only these two employees to teach them. This posed a challenge as all subjects had to be taught, and all school procedures had to be followed rigorously. Not surprisingly, Abel suffered from fatigue, and had insufficient time for his own studies.

His Academic History

Abel studied full-time at a conventional private secondary school during his period of advanced secondary education, leaving school at the end of sixth form. He then

completed a one-month training course in education before being posted to the school where he now teaches. He is called a licensed teacher as he had no previous background in teaching, but is now employed as such to cover the shortage of trained secondary school teachers in the country.

His decision to study at the OUT came about because of the Ministry of Education's requirement that all licensed teachers should undertake a degree programme there in an attempt to improve the quality of the teaching profession. Abel's choice of a Bachelor of Science degree, taken alongside an education course, was motivated by the desire to ease the shortage of science teachers in Tanzania.

Family Background

Abel is the youngest in a family of five children. His elder sisters and brothers had no real educational background, but his mother, a primary seven leaver, encouraged Abel to work hard at school. By the time he was born, Abel's father had already retired from his government post, and although Abel had no academic support from home, he appreciated his parents' financial assistance which enabled him to pay his school fees, buy books and become the first one of his family to complete an advanced secondary school education. The motivation to study hard also came from his colleagues at boarding school, although, unfortunately, he only managed to obtain a third division certificate on completion of his studies there.

His Educational Experiences at the OUT

Abel was the only OUT student in his village. He mainly studied during the evening and at the weekend as he had too much to do during the week. In general, he used the printed study materials provided by the OUT and - when his boss gave him permission - he sometimes attended the face-to-face sessions at regional centre B in order to deal with administration and registration issues, examination timetables, and results. He had no communication with any tutor regarding his particular subject area of study as the only tutor available had a background in business administration. There was no point in going to the regional centre for academic support because there was no one there who specialised in science.

Abel said that he had a bad experience at the OUT as a rural student. His science degree programme required practical experience in order for him to become competent. However, he was facing problems in some of the courses such as quantum physics and nuclear physics and in some mathematical topics that required personal assistance from the tutors.

In fact, he seemed to be very frustrated and appeared to lack the motivation to continue his studies. He reported that his remaining courses could not be completed without adequate assistance, and that he had no-one to discuss his problems with in the village. The costs of travelling to town and living there seemed to be too much for him. His salary scale was very low compared to diploma and graduate teachers, and he shared the little salary he earned with his immediate family.

When asked how he had already managed to complete three years of study Abel said he used to get government financial support, and so was able to attend extensive face-to-face sessions for licensed teachers held in Iringa. In addition, he sometimes studied at the Tanzania regional library and networked with his Science colleagues there during the face-to-face sessions. He added that the funding for licensed teachers was only for three years which meant that he no longer received any funds from the Ministry of Education. Moreover, Abel had also accessed free Internet services from Action Aid at the district centre, but then the service was withdrawn. In any case, access to such a facility was often too slow: for example, one could attempt to register for a course on numerous occasions, but still not be able to register successfully.

His Wishes

Abel wished that there was a study centre nearby, where he could interact with colleagues. He said that in order to meet his colleagues he would have to hire a motor cycle at a cost of 10,000 Tanzanian shillings (£4), each way, which he could not afford to do. He recommended that financial assistance from the government should be directed to distance students, while his most pressing need was for subject-based tutors to be placed at the regional centre.

3 Chapter Three: Review of the Literature and Relevant Theoretical Concepts

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will specifically examine the following areas of the literature: existing research on students' experiences in developing and developed countries; support practices and their importance to students' learning; and distance education in rural developing countries. The purpose is to provide an overview of existing knowledge and to demonstrate the gap which my study intends to fill. I will also provide detail of the theoretical framework and research questions that guided the conduct of this study.

This chapter is organised into five main parts. Part one introduces the chapter while the second part clarifies different terms and discusses the relevancy of support services in facilitating students' learning. Examples of support practices from different universities in the developing and developed world are also described. The third part looks at the literature on the roles and functions of the university generally, and discusses these in relation to the OUT. The fourth part focuses on rural areas in developing countries and the need to practice distance education in the region. It also discusses studies of students' experiences of university life, with a particular focus on rural and urban areas. Part five features the theoretical framework for this study and part six states the research questions. The chapter ends with a summary and conclusion.

3.2 Definitions and Significance of Support Services in Students' Learning

3.2.1 Definition of Terms

What is distance education?

The term 'distance education' has been used interchangeably with a number of affiliated terms, for example: independent study, home study, open learning and correspondence education (Keegan, 1986). It will be useful to map out a working definition for the purposes of this study.

As a term, distance education

“includes the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or on the same premises, but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and tuition of a tutorial organization” (Holmberg, 1977: 9).

This definition, therefore, signals that distance education takes place in an arena that is less well supervised than a university campus, and in a situation where students are separated from their tutors. This signifies that distance education is related to what is not on campus (Bayne et al, 2013: 2). Distance education is also viewed as:

“the family of instructional methods in which the teaching behaviours are executed apart from learning behaviours, including those that in a contiguous situation would be performed in the learner’s presence, so that communication between the teacher and the learner must be facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical or other devices” (Moore, 1973: 664).

This particular definition considers that media act as a tool to unify students, tutors and their universities, and explains that teaching takes place in a different place from learning. The media emphasised in this context include print, audio and audio visual components (Sharma, 2011, Moore and Kearsley, 2012), the use of which, it is argued, facilitates active interaction, engagement and participation in learning (Holmberg, 1989; Moore, 1989).

The instructional methods emphasised by Moore (above) include methods that are used in conventional systems, as well as in distance education. This means that there are times when distance students can gather together so that personal and/or group tutoring can take place. Such a system can be organised through arranged face-to-face sessions or through tele-conferencing (Simpson, 2000; Rumble, 2000). The purpose of engaging various instructional methods is to help provide real-time learning to the physically separated students.

Similarly, Moore and Kearsley (2005) defined distance education as:

“a planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching, requiring special course design and instruction techniques, communication through various technologies, and special organization and administrative arrangement” (2).

This definition emphasises the aspect of management and organization in teaching and learning.

The similarity in the definitions of distance education above allowed Keegan (1996) to summarize the main features of distance education, as follows:

- a) The quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process.
- b) The influence of educational organization, both in the planning and preparation of learning materials, and in the provision of student support services.
- c) The use of technical media, namely: print, audio, video and computer to unite teacher and learner, and thus help carry the content of the course.
- d) The provision of two-way communication so that students can benefit from dialogue, and in some cases, initiate it.
- e) The quasi-permanent absence of a learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that students are usually taught as individuals, rather than in groups; however, there exists the possibility of occasional meetings, either on a face-to-face basis or by electronic means, for both didactic and socialization purposes (50).

The above characteristics provide a comprehensive picture of the circumstances that distance students face, and the need for educational institutions to organise and structure good teaching and learning practices for them. For example, the emphasis on the use of interactive media is critical for dialogic purposes. In addition, the art of designing courses to suit the requirements of distance students, and to ensure the adequate availability of support services are among the key roles of distance educators, and are central to the enhancement of effective learning strategies.

However, the last characteristic detailed in the summary indicates that group learning is not common practice in distance education. This is contrary to the recommended practice which emphasises that a number of different forms of interactions (such as one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many) are preferable (Bates, 2005;

Borokhovski et al, 2012; Moore and Kearsley, 2012). Students must have the opportunity to communicate with their tutors, peers and administrative staff synchronously and asynchronously, regardless of their locations (Bates, 2005; Owens et al 2009; Nihuka, 2011; Sharma, 2011; Moore and Kearsley, 2012).

In summary, my study regards distance education as a mediated form of teaching and learning which separates tutors, students and peers in space, while its success depends on sound institutional support services and successful course material development. It should also be understood that although distance students have a distinctive independent status, and are able to benefit from the learning opportunities described above, they also have to accept the rules, regulations and limitations that this form of education involves.

Nevertheless, it is the case that no individual student can claim to be fully independent without support of one form or another from people and from the context within which they live (Merriam and Cafarella, 1991). Therefore, independence in learning needs to be adequately facilitated and supported among students. Indeed, this is an area where support services are particularly essential, especially as distance education is considered to be as:

“important as teaching; it is teaching; it is central to all we do as professionals” (Reid, 1995: 269).

If this is the case, then what is support and what actually is the role of ‘support services’ in distance education?

What are support services?

There is no single way of defining support services; however, a common goal attributed to them is to sustain and assist students to learn within their geographical locations (Dzakiria, 2008; Sharma, 2011; Krishnan, 2012). In fact, support services are often aligned with guidance, advice and counselling (Simpson, 2000; 2012). However, this to some extent distorts and narrows the meaning of what support services constitute in students learning. It is, therefore, important to clarify what I mean by ‘support services’ for the purposes of this study.

Support services have been defined by Simpson (2002) as constituting:

“all activities beyond the production and delivery of course materials that assist in the progress of students in their studies” (6).

The separation of course production and distribution from support services is an important move because often institutions fail to strike a balance between these two activities (Simpson, 2000, 2002), over-emphasising issues of course design, development and materials distribution.

Another definition is provided by Melofi (1998) who considers support services as being organised, purposeful activities that influence the smooth facilitation of teaching and learning in distance education, while Krishnan (2012: 460) viewed support services as being inclusive of facilities and activities that are provided to make the learning process easier and more interesting to the learner. These two definitions go further than just the production of materials and teaching. Instead, they add aspects of pre-arranged activities and facilities that assist effective teaching and learning, while ensuring that learning is simplified and made more interesting for students. I think this is significant, especially when we consider the multiple roles that students have and how far away they are from their universities. However, other factors such as students’ characteristics, their needs, geographical locations and the use of technology also need to be considered in order to effectively facilitate learning at a distance (Tait, 1995, 2000).

Garrison and Baynton (1987) describe support services as services that include all the resources that enable students to learn effectively. The authors contend that both human and non-human resources are important in enhancing learning at a distance. This definition comprises aspects of human, physical and material resources which are central to any educational system. Indeed, adequate access to relevant resources may be a decisive factor in improving the learning experiences of distance students.

It can be said, therefore, that despite the variation in definition among scholars, there is a common agreement that support services exist to enhance effective teaching and learning among students. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, ‘support services’

are defined as a set of comprehensive strategies, activities and resources which enable students to learn, and succeed in learning at a distance, while still being able to manage their usual social and economic activities.

The support services emphasised in this study are divided into two categories, namely: academic and non-academic support (Simpson, 2000, 2002, 2012; Mills, 2003). These forms of support are provided through a range of media and by a range of people, and they are also accessible to individuals and groups (Mills and Tait, 1996; Rumble, 2000; Mills, 2003). It is also understood that academic and non-academic support services from an institutional context may be incomplete without support from employers, friends, peers and family (Lockwood, 1995; Asbee and Simpson, 1998; Simpson, 2000, 2012).

What is Academic Support and Non-Academic Support?

Academic support is mostly referred to as tutoring, while non-academic support is linked to the administrative and affective needs of students (Simpson, 2002, 2012; Mills, 2003). Academic support services are related to all activities which contribute to the development of students' cognitive abilities, knowledge and learning skills in a specific course (Simpson, 2000; Tait, 2003). These include academic guidance and counselling, correspondence tuition, feedback, tutorials, study skills development and observation of students' progress (Sewart, 1993; Tait, 1995; Melofi, 1998; Simpson, 2000, 2012).

It can be said, therefore, that academic support services facilitate the proper implementation of an approach that emphasises student development. However, these goals are incomplete without the provision of non-academic support which assists students in addressing administrative, emotional and social problems that interfere with their studies. Focusing on both forms of support is important as each has a special role to play in developing students' learning abilities, retention and success.

Non-academic support for students is made up of a number of different aspects: these include guidance on accessing financial support, library services, media,

guidance and counselling, study centres, social events, registration and admission processes, emotional support, orientation, examination centres, study groups, residential schools, student newspapers, record keeping, students' associations, career development, information management and support for special needs (Rowntree, 1992; Tait, 1995; Melofi, 1998; Simpson, 2000, 2012; Tait and Mills, 2003; Dzakiria, 2008; Modesto and Tau, 2009; Kangai et al, 2011). Some of the support types listed help to promote academic learning, while others have a greater emphasis on helping students to become members of the university community.

Of course, other support is also available to students from friends, employers and immediate members of the families. These supporters can offer significant emotional and financial help, as well as provide learning spaces for the students within the community - often at home or in their places of work (Sewart, 1993; Reid, 1995; Melofi, 1998; Thrope, 1998; Rumble, 2000; Lentell, 2003, 2012; Dzakiria, 2008; Sharma, 2011).

3.2.2 The Importance of Support Services in Students' Learning

This section provides an in-depth discussion on the relevancy of support services to distance education students who are physically separated from their tutors, friends and university. This is done to provide a wider understanding of students' needs and the expected institutional interventions that should help to facilitate and sustain them in their studies.

Student Retention

The most burning issue in distance education is that of reducing the student drop-out rate in both conventional and distance education universities (Simpson, 2000, 2004, 2012; Thrope, 2003; De Hart and Venter, 2013). In fact, the rate of student dropout in distance education is much higher than in the conventional system (Kember, 1990; Mills, 2003; Simpson, 2004; Hannum et al, 2008; Simpson, 2012; De Hart and Venter, 2013). This high attrition rate might well damage the democratic goal of widening access to distance learning universities. The question to be asked, then, is: can we prevent the high number of student dropouts in distance learning by

providing adequate support services at an earlier stage (rather than merely applying these services as mitigating measures after the problems have occurred)?

The problem of student dropout at the university level has been noted in various studies. For example, a study conducted in one of the regional centres of the OUT discovered that 77 out of 294 (26%) students had dropped out during the period 1994-2007 (Rwejuna, 2008). Similarly, 36% of enrolled students were found to have dropped out from the Open University of the UK (Tait, 2003). Moreover, statistics from 2001-2008 from the Open University of Malaysia show that 42.3% of students dropped out of their system (Latif et al, 2009). These cases exemplify the need for strategies that support students in order to sustain them in their learning environments.

Given these reports of high dropout rates, it is necessary to reflect on the factors that may have caused them. A review of the literature from developing and developed countries posits that students drop out for a number of reasons: the distance from study centres, inadequate support, lack of time, the distance students have to travel to attend lab sessions, inadequate access to learning materials, pressure from work, academic workload, location, poor means of communication, isolation, computer illiteracy, poor feedback mechanisms, a lack of proficiency in the language of instruction, family problems, financial problems and a lack of study skills (Bhalalusesa 1999; Msuya and Maro 2002; Rovai, 2003; Tait, 2003 ; Fozdar et al, 2006; Mahai, 2008; Latif, et al, 2009; Bayne and Ross, 2011; Kangai et al, 2011; De Hart and Venter, 2013).

The problems detailed above demonstrate the need for proper intervention in order to adequately support students in keeping up with their learning programmes. The presence of support services is central to the reduction of student dropout rates in distance education programmes (Simpson, 2004, 2012). Indeed, without such support, students may feel overwhelmed and simply give up (Kumar et al, 2000). Interestingly, a number of scholars suggest that academic and non- academic support would help to retain students in their programmes (Kember, 1990; Mills and Tait,

1996; Purnell et al, 1996; Krauth and Carbajal, 1999; McLoughlin, 2002; Rovai, 2003; Simpson, 2004, 2012; Fozdar et al, 2006; Kangai et al, 2011; Bukaliya, 2012).

Moreover, institutional creativity in designing activities that help institutions to engage with students is a necessity (Simpson, 2004). For example, if students had more opportunities to regularly interact with their institution and tutors then their progress could be monitored more efficiently. This would at least offer students some compensation for the physical distance that separates them from their learning institution. Other retention strategies such as moral support from partners, families and friends, and the encouragement of contact and support from other students are all good preventive measures that would help students to avoid withdrawing from their studies (Asbee and Simpson, 1998: 56).

A good example of retention mechanism can be drawn from the Open University of Malaysia (OUM). This university has established an electronic customer relations management system to handle the challenges that students face. This management service has the following features: orientation programmes; an upgraded physical and ICT infrastructure; examination clinics; and guidance and counselling sessions which are carried out through appointment or learning workshops (Latif et al, 2009). These are very practical suggestions, although their functionality requires the availability of adequate resources.

Academic Demands

One of the goals of providing education at a distance is often to provide equal access to education (Daniel, 2007). However, widening access should also be accompanied by strategies that help to meet students' academic needs. This would ensure that students attain their goals and at the same time are sustained by the quality of education that is provided (Simpson, 2000).

Students in distance education courses are expected to engage with their course materials, find reference books, develop writing skills, improve their knowledge of the subject matter and widen their reasoning ability (Thrope, 1997, 1998, 2000; Bhalalusesa, 2006). This is not easy as students quite often experience difficulties in

developing study skills or in time management as they often have other multiple roles to play in their families and in the work place (Kaye and Rumble, 1981; Garrison, 1987; Simpson, 2000, 2012; Mills, 2003).

Perhaps increased institutional emphasis on interaction and communication would reduce the academic pressure experienced by students and help to improve their academic progress. This might be initiated through students' meetings, group discussions and even through the use of social media. This would allow the sharing of experience and reinforce the learning process. For instance, the planning of institutionally- arranged meetings would allow students to listen to or see recorded programmes, and thereafter discuss the contents (Simpson, 2000). These activities would encourage students to engage in meaningful educational discussion and broaden their knowledge base.

Furthermore, institutions could also assist students in overcoming academic barriers by enabling students to plan their own learning activities and give advice on tackling assignments and how to deal with failure (Dzakiria, 2008; Sharma, 2011). For example, tutor intervention in terms of interaction and feedback provision could be implemented. Tutors can also provide academic guidance, counselling, motivation, encouragement and guide students to prepare for examinations (Beaudoin, 1990; Stevenson et al 1996; Lentell, 2003).

The feedback from tutors could be provided in a number of ways: through correspondence tuition with tutors' comments on students' scripts and assignments; through face-to-face conversations; by telephone; or by using the Internet (Thrope, 2000, 2003; Bhalalusesa, 2006). In these ways, students can use the feedback provided by tutors to improve their educational performance.

Students' Identity

Students' need for affiliation and identification with an institution is often neglected in distance education (Sharma, 2011). Students occupy multiple identity roles (Kember, 1990; Asbee and Simpson, 1998; Usun, 2004; Askham, 2008; Sharma, 2011). First, students are often adults with families and socio-economic

responsibilities, identifying as individuals with maturity, autonomy and responsibility. On the other hand, these adults are also students. This second form of identity implies that students can also feel incomplete, dependent and in deficit (Askham, 2008).

It can be difficult to balance the identity of a student with that of an adult who is responsible and independent. Often adult students become nervous, lack confidence and develop a fear of failure through the lack of time to study (Jadege, 1994; Boud and Solomon, 2003). It is in this context that academic and administrative support is required to re-orient and balance the student's learning role with his or her socio-economic responsibilities.

The provision of tutor support and the establishment of study centres close to the students' living context is considered as being of significant benefit within the literature (Kember, 1990; Mills and Tait, 1996; Modesto and Tau, 2009). Such centres help to influence peer interaction and the sharing of common experiences, both of which are fundamental in maintaining student identity.

The study centres can assume the following roles: a place to study; a library centre; a meeting place for peers and administrative staff; a place for students' association activities; a source of information, guidance and counselling to the general public in a local area; a place where technology can be accessed; a place where access to local guidance and counselling can be received; a place where individual and group tuition, group viewing and listening can take place; and as a facility for taking examinations (Mills and Tait, 1996: 74). Such activities undoubtedly improve interaction and have an influence on learning and guidance.

Obviously, issues of costs need to be considered since effective study centres may require physical, human and material resources. However, the importance of these centres cannot be underestimated, especially in remote rural areas where students face an inadequacy of learning resources and tutor support, and are often challenged by issues of identity (Gatsha, 2008; Ngengebule, 2008; Mbukusa, 2009; Lephallala and Makoe, 2012).

Distance and Isolation

The question as to whether students experience isolation when studying in distance education is not a new one (Saba, 2005). Feelings of isolation are activated by the physical and psychological distance which separates students from their tutors and other students (Moore, 1993; Saba, 2005). However, the development of Internet technology has done a great deal to alleviate this in certain situations (Bates, 2005; Macintyre and Macdonald, 2011; Moore and Kearsley, 2012).

Observations carried out in remote areas in the developed world reveal that distantly-located students were in need of institutional affiliation, emotional connectedness, interaction and tutor support (Kaye and Rumble, 1981; Galusha, 1998; Mbukusa, 2009; Owens et al, 2009; Pardasani et al, 2012). In addition, students also feel insecure at times and this can affect their confidence (Galusha, 1998). Distance education students suffer more from these problems than those who are in the conventional system, especially as the former group have fewer opportunities to share, chat and discuss academic and non-academic issues (Sharma, 2011). Therefore, interactions and dialogue in human, technological and content forms are essential components of a support system that is able to help students overcome issues of distance and isolation (Moore, 1989; Simpson, 2002, 2012; Chan and Waugh, 2007; Baggaley, 2008; Pardasani et al, 2012; Borokhovski et al, 2012).

Newness in the Field

Distance education has existed for more than 150 years, and yet the need for orientation and understanding of its teaching and learning practices is still crucial if effective learning is to be achieved (Holmberg, 1989). Most of the students who enrol in distance education have already acquired an educational orientation derived from the conventional system of education (Thrope, 2003). However, students entering distance studies have to acquire new practices that are different from those they experienced in their previous educational institutions (McLaughlin and Marshall, 2000).

These new practices are often perceived as being confusing and strange (Sharma, 2011). Often students in this situation experience problems in managing their own learning and in developing study skills (Kaye and Rumble, 1981). It is at this stage that support services such as orientation sessions, along with guidance and counselling, are most required to help students accommodate to the new practices.

Feelings of estrangement are also experienced by adult students, mainly because of their age, and of the length of time they have been away from education (Kaye and Rumble, 1981; Holmberg, 1989; Moore and Kearsley, 1996). Their exposure to other socio-economic activities, allied to this sense of newness, may also affect their confidence and motivation to learn.

Support as a complementary measure is crucial in assisting these students to regain or maintain their interest, to orient themselves, to develop learning strategies and to cope with their new situation. In addition, support to students at different stages, for example at entry, in-course or post-course will help new and continuing students to cope and make future plans (Rowntree, 1992; Simpson, 2002; Floyd and Powell, 2004; Forrester et al, 2004; Kangai et al, 2011).

For example, students at the entry stage encounter issues of orientation, admission and other pre- enrolment concerns (Floyd and Powell, 2004). Therefore, support services such as orientation in study skills, guidance on course selection, the acquisition of basic ICT skills and an understanding of the relevant teaching and learning processes are all suitable for the start-up stage (Floyd and Powell, 2004; Forrester et al, 2004). Orientation seems to be especially significant in the entry stage as it prepares students for academic socialization and an understanding of their institution (Sharma, 2011).

Socio-economic and Emotional Needs

Distance students are adult learners who assume studies while managing personal, family, moral, community and economic challenges. Balancing such challenges is a difficult and daunting task. Given that classes are not held at the institution, it leaves students with the option of choosing where and when to study. Most students study at

home and in the office (Moore and Kearsley, 1996; Philip, 2003; Sirvastava and Reddy, 2007). However, these two learning environments may be obstructive to the learning process. Problems such as domestic work, noise, lack of peace, family commitments and low concentration may all be present and affect the student's study time (Kaye and Rumble, 1981; Moore and Kearsley, 1996; Taplin and Jadege, 2001; Mensa et al, 2008; Gudhlanga et al, 2012).

Given the need for adequate space and time among students, Kember (1990) argues that:

“in countries where the home environment is unsuitable for study, institutions should arrange access to study rooms”
(22).

The emphasis here is on the establishment of study centres close to students' locations which I have discussed above.

Students' failure to concentrate properly in their studies may also be compounded by their involvement in socio-economic activities. This demonstrates the need for institutional flexibility in the university's programmes so that students can manage their time properly. If students are helped to develop time management and study skills and if some institutional flexibility can be introduced in the scheduling of examinations, for example, then students might be able to balance their educational activities with other pursuits in a more successful manner (Mills, 2003).

For example, Mills (2003) cited Athabasca University as a good example of how to assess students' needs in terms of time management. This university enables students to select alternative examination dates and venues in case they miss the scheduled examinations. Such flexibility is required in distance education, although care should be taken to balance the conduct of examinations with other academic activities.

Emotional problems such as illness, divorce and bereavement must also be considered when supporting distance students (Simpson, 2000, 2002). These problems are sometimes difficult to manage in the absence of institutional guidance and counselling as students may experience problems of concentration as well as feelings of desperation and thoughts of dropping out. However, emotional issues

such as these appears to be given less attention by institutions and often cause conflict within the tutor's role (Sharma, 2011).

In fact, it is difficult for tutors to concentrate on academic guidance, while at the same time trying to deal with students' personal and social issues. It is probably the case that addressing emotional issues requires specialised skills that academics are not trained for. Indeed, such skills may not come naturally to some tutors. Students, therefore, require specialised counsellors to support them in dealing with particular emotional or personal problems so that they manage their studies more successfully (Mahai, 2008; Kangai et al, 2011; Krishnan, 2012).

Moreover, emotional issues may best be addressed from outside the educational context. Research surveys in distance education show that support from employers, friends and family members contributes to the success of students in learning (Asbee and Simpson, 1998; Simpson, 2000, 2012; Fordar et al, 2006). This is supported by the argument that students are less likely to complete their courses if their families, friends and colleagues do not support them (Bartels, 1982: 10). This is a significant view because students spend most of their time outside the institution's walls.

It is friends, families and employers who will, in fact, be more aware of the day-to-day challenges experienced by students than their institutions. Thus, involving these people in helping students to manage their personal and socio-economic problems would undoubtedly contribute to an improvement in the learning experiences of students. Involvement can be enhanced through advocacy, and the creation of awareness of the difficulties experienced by distance students through the use of leaflets, letters, newspapers and open-days, would also help to raise the awareness and confidence of students (Mays, 2000; Simpson, 2002).

Administrative Needs

Distance students sometimes experience administrative problems that require additional support from their institutions (Purnell et al, 1996). These administrative challenges may be caused by students or may be activated by their institutions. The administrative requests which arise from students' actions are mainly associated with

demands for learning materials, financial support, or access to information; while delays in admission and registration and the failure to attend tutorials, face-to-face sessions or examinations are invariably experienced among distance students (Purnell et al, 1996; Chandran, 2011; Kangai et al, 2011; Olakulehin and Panda, 2011).

Other forms of administrative challenges emanate from the problems that institutions have. For example, the Open University of Zimbabwe encountered financial problems that caused it to reduce the number of tutorial hours and stop production of course modules (study materials) (Kangai and Bukaliya, 2011). In addressing the problem, the University replaced the course modules with a CD-ROM text. This caused further problems due to technological difficulties and the students' lack of technical skills. Such experiences obviously cause students unforeseen problems, both at an academic and administrative level.

Another example can be drawn from distance education universities in India, where students experienced delays in the dispatch and reception of course materials (Krishnan, 2012). In fact, there were also problems with the loss of assignments, the lack of up-to-date information and late assignment evaluation (Kumar et al, 2000; Kumar et al, 2011; Sharma, 2011). Such challenges are likely to have reduced students' motivation to learn and their performance may have suffered as a result. Therefore, ensuring that students have ready access to administrative support is crucial if we are to attain effective learning outcomes in distance education.

I have demonstrated in this section that students experience different challenges that restrain their educational progress. As I discussed above, it will be impossible to expect a high student completion rate in the absence of quality and quantity in support service systems. Thus, emphasizing the accessibility and availability of academic and non-academic support services, regardless of students' geographical locations, is essential.

Since studies indicate that urban students experience fewer problems regarding issues of support (as they at least have access to tutors, ICT and other learning resources) ((Mcharazo and Olden, 2000; Bhalalusesa, 2001; Maro and Msuya, 2002;

Mbukuso, 2009; Owens et al, 2009; Macintyre and Macdonald, 2011; Lephalala and Makoe, 2012), this study has directed its efforts to rural areas, where less information on distance learning students is documented Support Services from Selected Distance Education Universities throughout the World.

This section discusses examples of support services that are provided at selected distance learning universities in both the developed and developing world, and in Africa, in particular. The purpose is to demonstrate how other universities provide academic and non-academic support to facilitate the teaching and learning of their students. The section also aims at exploring differences in the application of various forms of support which are thought to be suitable for learners in rural and urban areas. Examples drawn from the selected universities will act as a context for the following discussion on support provision in rural Tanzania.

The Open University in the UK (United Kingdom) – The Developed World

Current discussion of support services in distance education, particularly in the universities in the developed world, tends to be centred on the provision of online services (Philip, 2003; Saba, 2005; Owen et al 2009; Macintyre and MacDonald, 2011; Roy and Schumm, 2011; Moore and Kearsley, 2012). This is less so in developing countries where the application of media and technology is limited due to the kinds of technological and infrastructural problems I described earlier (Rye and Zubaidah, 2008; Latif et al, 2009; Mbukusa, 2009; Wright et al 2009; World Bank, 2010; Ramos et al, 2011).

In the developed world, the application of technology in education has changed dramatically from one generation to the next. For example, the Open University in the UK (OUUK) progressed through the provision of print media, to audio technology, audio-visual technology and now digital media in its many forms. To date, these developments have made a significant improvement in the provision of support services to distance education.

The history of the Open University in the UK can be traced back to its establishment in 1969 (Tait, 2003). It began with the enrolment of 25,000 students in 1971

(Tresman, 2002) and is now among the world's 'mega universities' (Daniel, 1996). The university offers professional courses at certificate, diploma, degree and postgraduate level. Teaching materials, high quality student support services and efficient logistical systems are considered to be among the key components of its success (Rumble, 2000).

Teaching at the OUUK takes place via many different media, although still values high quality print materials and face-to-face sessions, despite the growing contribution of the internet as an educational tool (Daniel, 1996; Boyd-Barrett, 2000; Tait, 2003; Sclater, 2008). To enhance effective learning, the university provides prepared course units, externally-published course readers, set-books, broadcast notes and audio and video cassettes (Boyd-Barrett, 2000: 479), as well as an online learning management system.

In ensuring that support services are available within students' local areas, the university has established more than 13 regional centres that operate throughout the country and have access to over 300 study centres on students' doorsteps (Boyd-Barrett, 2000; Choudhry et al, 2008).

The effective use of technology in teaching and support at the OUUK started in the 1980s when the university chose to use computer technology to work alongside print media and audio and video cassettes. Then in 1990, the university integrated the great potential offered by the Internet to facilitate the teaching and support of students in their learning tasks (Tresman, 2002).

The development of such technology has enabled the OUUK to offer relevant support to students within their homes (Macintyre and Mac Donald, 2011). Students are able to access academic and non-academic support services through asynchronous and synchronous modes. In 2005, the OUUK introduced the Moodle Learning Management System (Sclater, 2008), allowing the integration of text, graphics, sound, animation and videos, video conferencing, audio conferencing and instant messaging (Sclater, 2008: 3). This helped to create a high degree of flexibility in teaching methods so that students now receive a high level of technologically-mediated support.

The OUUK has also introduced subject communities in their online spaces which has enabled the university to manage dropout issues and to enhance the successful re-enrolment of students (Sclater, 2008). This is a great achievement as the student dropout rate has always been one of the main concerns in distance education, as already discussed (Kember, 1990; Mills, 2003; Tait, 2003; Simpson, 2004, 2012; Hannum et al, 2008; Latif et al, 2009; De Hart and Venter, 2013).

The OUUK demonstrates a high level of skill and application in the technology it uses to support students' learning. Students can therefore, gain access to immediate support, open up opportunities for socialization and obtain academic feedback on their progress.

The Open University of Malaysia- Developing World

The practice of distance education in developing countries is not so very different from the practices used in the developed world: these universities also use print and digital resources to facilitate the learning of students. However, the differences emerge when one compares the extent of digital applications that are available in teaching and learning.

The Open University of Malaysia (OUM) was established in 2000. It is a new private university with more than 50 study centres and 10 regional centres (Othman et al, 2005). By 2009 the university had more than 80,000 students, compared to the 753 students who enrolled in 2001 (Latif et al, 2009). Statistics also indicate that more than 90% of students at the OUM are undergraduates, while the remainder are postgraduate students.

The University uses face-to-face and asynchronous online learning to facilitate teaching at a distance (Lim et al, 2011). Students have access to printed modules, tutors and peers, while access to library services is also provided at the main campus and in the regional centres. Students also have access to e-books in digital form. The OUM has also widened its scope by developing radio programmes and offering other downloadable programmes for students' use. In addition, the university has introduced an examination clinic and a number of learners' services centres.

It also offers orientation programmes for newcomers and provides guidance and counselling on demand in workshop form. The University's study centres, which operate nationwide, have tutorial rooms, computer laboratories and library and Internet facilities (Othman et al, 2009). With the emphasis on online learning, the University uses a Learning Management System which allows students to participate in online discussion with teachers and peers. However, these discussions are argued to lack the 'cognitive dimensions' necessary for understanding and constructing knowledge (Othman et al, 2005).

The OUM also applies mobile learning through the use of SMS (mobile text messages) in the teaching of undergraduate programmes. SMS is acknowledged to be a powerful tool in supporting students within their locales (Lim et al, 2011) as it allows students immediate communication with the University, tutors and peers. It also brings flexibility in terms of time and space as students can access information anytime and anywhere.

Nonetheless, the use of SMS sometimes proves to be ineffective because of technical problems that the institution has difficulties in resolving (Lim et al, 2011). As a result, there are occasions when students experience the non-delivery of messages due to delays. A number of other problems can also occasionally emerge: for example, the size of the mobile phone screen, its short battery life, low access to Internet services, the quality of software and the poor mobile infrastructure. All of these limit the effectiveness of mobile learning, particularly in developing countries (Wright et al, 2009; Valk et al, 2010; Kumar et al, 2011).

In spite of these challenges, the potential of mobile phones in learning has been recognised to be particularly effective in supporting students at the Universities of Pretoria, South Africa and at Makerere University in Uganda (Lim et al, 2011). The use of SMS in learning has also been observed in the Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) (Keendjele, 2008). Although these systems serve students in both rural and urban areas, the urban students do not experience as many problems in accessing SMS as there is a good urban network.

The University of South Africa- Africa

The University of South Africa is located in the sub-Saharan part of Africa. It is the oldest University involved in the practice of distance education in the African region, having more than fifty years' experience and takes its place among the mega universities of the world (Ngegebule, 2008). As a higher education learning institution, UNISA enrolls more than 85% of the entire distance learning community of students in South Africa (Lephalala and Makoe, 2012).

A study conducted in South Africa discovered that 60% of the enrolled students come from historically marginalised areas (Ngegebule, 2008). This asserts the role of distance education in widening access to marginalised people and to those students living in impenetrable areas. The teaching and learning processes at UNISA are facilitated through the use of face-to-face sessions, correspondence tuition, technology and onsite facilities (Ngegebule, 2008). Tutors use these facilities to contact students and they also use letters and faxes for communication purposes.

Interactive patterns are enhanced through the use of digital and multimedia services such as the Internet, video, audio conferences and cassettes, while print materials, learning spaces and library services are also among the services offered to students (Nonyongo, 2003). The University has also developed the *MyUnisa* web page as a platform for communication between tutors and students (Council of Higher Education, 2010).

Despite the availability of these support services at UNISA, an audit report by the Council of Higher Education (2010) indicated that those regional centres which were located far from urban areas were not performing up to standard, and that students suffered from a lack of learning resources and tutor interactions. Moreover, other studies in South Africa showed that distantly-located students experienced inadequate access to human and physical support (Chadibe, 2002; Ngegebule, 2008; Lephalala and Makoe, 2012).

Supporting students within their localities according to their needs appears crucial in this context. Although less information is documented on the learning strategies

adopted by distantly-located students at the University of South Africa, it appears likely that students' experience and knowledge of the new technological applications differs from that of the OUUK students due to the infrastructural challenges described.

Conclusion Drawn from Support Practices at these Universities

The support practices demonstrated by these universities in both developed and developing countries show the variety of initiatives undertaken to ensure effective teaching and learning. Universities in developed countries appear to have overcome the challenges of distance and isolation more successfully than universities in developing countries. The investment made in technological innovation in the developed world has, for example, allowed students and tutors to interact synchronously and asynchronously. However, the efforts initiated in the use of SMS and mobile phone learning may, if effectively developed, help to enhance communication and learning practices among students in the developing countries also.

3.3 The Functions of the Open University of Tanzania and a Global View on the 'Role of the University'

This section discusses the functions of the OUT while reflecting on the documented role of 'the university' globally. In doing so, it will prepare for the discussion of this study's findings, and the conclusions to be drawn regarding the practice and policy at the OUT in the following chapters.

I will begin by highlighting the documented functions of the OUT, after which two competing views of the role and purpose of 'the university' will be described. Each of these two views will be described in reference to the OUT.

3.3.1 Functions of the Open University of Tanzania

As stated in previous sections, the OUT is mandated to practice distance education at the university level in Tanzania. With accordance to the Universities Act No.7 of 2005 and the OUT charter of 2007, the University is entitled to carry out the following functions:

1. Preserve and transmit knowledge by teaching through various means including that of tuition, seminars and residential courses, with the help of modern technology.
2. Address the social, economic and development problems of the community through the application of research and consultancies.
3. Promote the educational wellbeing of Tanzanians by offering demand-driven programmes.
4. Provide opportunities for higher education to the broader segment of the population, mainly by means of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) courses.
5. Conduct examinations and grant degree, diploma, certificate and other awards of the University.
6. Encourage collaboration and partnership in the acquisition, provision and application of higher education at institutional, regional and international level.
7. Promote equity and widen access to education to marginalised and disadvantaged groups.
8. Support and promote gender-equity and mainstreaming in the acquisition, provision and application of higher education.
9. Address the HIV pandemic in the course of offering higher education.
10. Conduct activities with the highest standard of integrity in line with institutionally accepted norms and values (OUT, 2011: 64).

The functions of the OUT stated above complement global efforts of providing distance education in the following ways: first, they expand access to higher education; second, they attempt to address socio-economic problems that exist in the country; and, lastly, they address the national need for an educated population. The functions also comply with the Tanzanian Vision 2025, and with rural development and poverty alleviation strategies that aim at both improving people's socio-economic wellbeing and creating rural development through educational provision (URT, 1998; 2001; 2005, 2011b). Moreover, the functions align with the roles of distance education as documented in the literature (Daniel, 2007; Kwapong, 2007; Anuwar, 2008).

Most of the OUT's functions, as described above, look outward and emphasise issues related to communities, the wellbeing of Tanzanians, equity and access and solving the country's socio-economic problems. Such contributions may be largely appreciated by society as a whole because the University is part of the social world (Collini, 2012). However, the stated functions do not explicitly indicate that the OUT is concerned with the development of students' relevant competencies, knowledge and skills.

What is not explicitly stated in the functions presented above is the intention to develop students' intellectual, creative and problem solving skills, let alone to develop knowledge and critical commentary skills that would allow students to make informed decisions (Barnett, 1992, 2011; Kreber, 2009, 2013; Biesta, 2011; Cosgrove, 2011; Collini, 2012). One might argue that these traits depend on pedagogy, course content, tutor support, access to learning resources and social networking. These were the factors, therefore, that prompted me to examine the functions of the university in a global context, and at the same time to reflect on the functions of the OUT in the hope of finding out where the gaps and elisions are.

3.3.2 The Role of 'the University' Globally

In this section the core functions and at times the neglected roles of universities are discussed. The literatures cited earlier suggest that the roles of universities throughout the world seem to be similar, regardless of the mode of education adopted. However, particularly in recent decades, it has become apparent that there is no single way of understanding and describing the particular functions of universities (Collini, 2012).

Indeed, the very purpose of higher education itself is contested, as Barnett's (1992) classification of higher education functions reveals. I have paid much attention to Barnett's (1992) views in the following discussion simply because they incorporate global debates on the functions of 'the university'. Barnett categorised these views while observing the implications they had for quality assessment - an essential component in the practice of education today. For discussion purposes I have also incorporated other references from the debate on the roles of the university.

The System View

The system view, according to Barnett (1992) considers the functions of universities based on three perspectives: namely, the production of qualified human capital, the training for research careers, and the extension of life chances (18).

(The Development of) Human Capital

One of the most commonly-understood functions of the university is the development of human capital. Globally, universities are considered as industries which produce the labour force for the world economy (Biesta, 2011; Barnett, 2011; Collini, 2012). It is, therefore, a common belief that universities exist to produce a skilled labour force capable of stimulating and promoting social and economic development.

People expect that the ‘product’ from the universities should be competent and skilled enough to be absorbed into the economy and thus guarantee its prosperity. The economics of higher education have thus increased demand for, and generated interest in the adoption of distance education, particularly in developing countries (Daniel, 2007; Kwapong, 2007; Anuwar, 2008). Evidence of this can be seen in function number three of the OUT, namely, the intention to provide demand-driven courses to address the economic needs of society. Such a policy, however, could have implications for universities, both in terms of resources and values, as society’s demands are constantly on the move, and never static (Bok, 2003).

Nevertheless, the intention to develop human capital at the Open University of Tanzania is seen as being the panacea to the challenges the country faces in its social and economic development (OUT, 2011b). The functional aspect of developing human capital in a poor country like Tanzania is undoubtedly of great significance, given that more than 80% of its population currently live in rural areas and are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods (Aikaeli, 2010).

However, the development of human capital must go hand-in-hand with an educational process that emphasises understanding, and the development of knowledge and critical skills. With these, students can exploit the economic and

social opportunities open to them, and also act as responsible citizens (Englund, 2002; Kreber, 2009; McArthur, 2011).

Research Careers

Another function of the university in this cluster relates to the development of research careers. It is clear that the world depends greatly on university researchers for a variety of reasons: for the information they provide (Collini, 2012) and for the advances they make in innovation, technology and discovery, all of which add to the general improvement in human life and wellbeing (Bok, 2003; OUT, 2011b; Barnett, 2011).

However, all of this depends to a large extent on the capacity of the University to provide a systematic body of knowledge on all issues by means of research and the dissemination of findings in publications, and at seminars and conferences. Moreover, they also have the authority and obligation to train career researchers (Biesta, 2011). Hence, the research function in universities has to be maintained so that it retains its value as being the criteria for scholarship.

It is clear, therefore, that universities have a special role in developing new researchers. This function is made possible through the support of academics and tutors in guiding students to become innovative and creative independent researchers. Tutors can also help to develop a culture of researching by encouraging students to observe and then emulate the tutor's activities (Barnett, 1992).

There is no doubt that undergraduates and postgraduate students need to acquire research skills so that they can engage fully in future local and international activities. While it is argued that research careers remain open only to a few, elite students (Barnett, 2011), I believe it is possible to create a culture whereby more students can gain the research qualifications necessary to address the numerous problems confronting our social, economic and political world. In fact, some of these graduates may be recruited for research posts outside the academic world.

For instance, the OUT is involved in addressing the social and economic problems of communities through research and consultancy, as stipulated in core function number

two. However, this function seems to have less of a role to play in developing research skills among individual students. Rather, it focuses on an institutional role in addressing the challenges taking place in the social world. Nevertheless, my findings indicate that some of the degree programmes at the OUT such as law, for example, provide opportunities to students to conduct independent studies. The skills acquired by such students, if properly utilised, may in time help to solve at least some of the socio-economic challenges faced by people in rural areas.

Extending Life Chances

Higher education is known for its potential to increase each individual's capacity to participate in society, a function that has a great deal in common with that of research careers and human capital development (Barnett, 1992). The function of extending one's life chances emphasises the enjoyment in acquiring the rewards of education by positioning individuals to gain benefit from the opportunities available in the social world.

Even marginalised and disadvantaged people such as prisoners, women, and those in rural communities have the opportunity; it is argued, to access higher education in the distance mode (Zindi and Aucoin, 1995; Simpson, 2002; Tait, 2000; Kwapong, 2007). This role is emphasised by the OUT in core functions number four, seven, eight and nine. Empowering people to access education and harness its benefits is increasingly relevant today, given the desire across the world to achieve access to information, knowledge and economic improvement.

The OUT through the Lens of the System View

The system view centres its argument on human capital development, training for research careers, and extending life chances. These functions are all important in that they recognise the societal context of universities and emphasise that they cannot function in isolation from the social and economic needs of nations and their people.

However, these stated functions have a particular 'outward-looking' orientation which is inadequate when we consider other potential emphasis given to learning skills, the quality of education, and the enhancement of individuals' critical

capacities through education. In other words, the system view in general demonstrates a neglect of students' personal development and a larger agenda of critical intellectual skills development. However, if I look at the OUT through the lens of the system view, I see that many of the OUT's functions centre on this perspective.

For example, it is only in functions numbers one and ten that the OUT demonstrates an intention to develop individual students, although this is not explicitly stated. The OUT's focus on the system view can be observed even in its core mission statement which aims to:

“continuously provide affordable quality open and distance education, research and public services for the sustainable and equitable socio-economic development of Tanzania in particular, and the rest of the world” (OUT, 2011b: 64).

The mission statement's intention, therefore, is focused on human capital development, with the improvement of students' individual experiences and critical capacities barely referenced, even implicitly, within the identified functions of the institution. While understanding that the aspirations of universities to meet national and international expectations is important, it is also necessary to focus on the internal processes that affect the academic well-being of our students.

The Students View

The students view centres on the notion of students' experiences of education and their personal development. The development of individual students' autonomy, intellectual abilities, personal characteristics and critical commentary skills are considered as significant in this view (Barnett, 1992).

The Development of Students' Autonomy in Learning

The first aspect featured in this view is one that seems to draw less attention at university, namely that of the development of students' autonomy (Barnett, 1992). This view emphasises the approach that allows students to lead their own learning away from the controlled environment of the teacher. In such a context students are expected to guide their own learning, participate in learning, share experiences and be independent in carrying out learning tasks. This does not mean the role of the tutor is undermined, but rather it is altered to become that of a facilitator. However, students are required to be challenged and supported in order to develop autonomy in learning.

Before students can acquire individual autonomy they must be empowered to do so by trusting the educational process. This requires tutors to provide tasks which develop students' intellectual integrity, independence and confidence. As a particular mode of learning, therefore, distance learning is a suitable means of tapping into the potential of students as its very ethos assumes autonomy and independence in learning (Holmberg, 1981; Moore, 1986, 1989).

The Development of Intellectual Abilities

The development of intellectual abilities is another aspect of the students view. From this perspective, universities are there to assist students to actively participate in searching, acquiring and applying knowledge in order to solve various puzzles that will assist their personal development. This can be enhanced by exposing students to different learning experiences, providing intellectual activities and giving them the opportunity to access a wide range of academic resources. The purpose of this view is to enable students to read and understand beyond their confined areas of specialization or discipline so that they can become critical thinkers (Barnett, 1992).

The educational process should therefore not confine students to a single discipline, but rather provide wider opportunities for learning (Collini, 2012). For example, students should be permitted to choose courses that take place outside their own school or department. Such interdisciplinary learning opportunities may create

awareness, broaden knowledge, develop a sense of appreciation of other disciplines and help students to solve social, economic, political and cultural puzzles. In this context, the provision of support services by universities can enable students to develop intellectual skills, both within and outside their areas of specialization, and are thus of the utmost importance.

The Development of Students' Personal Characteristics

The students view also emphasises the development of students' personal characteristics. Barnett (1992) looks at these from the angle of social networking and of nurturing students' abilities to successfully complete their studies and attain their goals. Students need interaction with tutors and peers, social relationships, and the opportunity to share their concerns in order to reach their goals. By emphasising involvement in social relationships, in effective interaction and engagement in the university's social activities, tutors can help students to improve their academic performance and cope with the demands of student life.

Therefore, creating an enabling environment that can nurture the development of students' personal characteristics should be a goal of all universities. Characteristics such as leadership, integrity, honesty, attentiveness and application are significant factors in this context. Supporting students so that they can develop social interaction and relationship skills, while still emphasising the importance of knowledge development and exchange, is imperative to position students in a dynamic environment that requires their critical engagement and participation. Therefore, interaction among teachers and students, coupled with the acquisition of a wider knowledge base, can shape individuals to become responsible ambassadors for their universities, both in their communities and in the world of work (McArthur, 2011; Collini, 2012).

The Development of Critical Commentary Skills

The development of a critical mind and the development of the 'critical commentary skills' is the last characteristic identified in the student's view (Barnett, 1992). Such skills are developed in the course of learning. For example, students' participation

and exposure in university debates can help them to adopt a critical stance. Universities can also nurture this culture by giving students the opportunities to challenge each other, to argue, inspire, comment, discuss and provoke (Biesta, 2011; McArthur, 2011).

The development of cognitive abilities, critical thinking skills, personal characteristics and autonomy in learning discussed in this section depend on a number of factors: the students' learning environment, the students' proficiency in language, the role of the tutors, the interactive mechanisms and the nature of assessment. Inadequacies in any one these fields may lead to variations in students' academic achievements and in their character development.

In summary, therefore, the students view emphasises the development and nurturing of students' abilities as core the core function of the university.

The OUT through the Lens of the Students View

It is clear that the characteristics of the students view are reflected less strongly in the functions of the OUT, as presented in section 3.3.1 above. This lack is also acknowledged in certain documents published by the OUT. It is revealed that students at the OUT suffer from a lack of reading culture and self-learning skills (OUT, 2011b: 26). Study skills and a culture of reading need to be nurtured and supported by tutors and by the availability of educational resources. Unfortunately, this has been a problem at the OUT as the findings of this current study will reveal.

The neglect of critical intellectual skills development limits the effectiveness of the university's academic programmes, restricting students' intellectual development. My thesis argues that academic and non-academic support services should be made available and accessible to all students in order to address this issue, and to work toward the improvement of students' academic performance.

3.3.3 The Eclectic Perspective

By reflecting on both views – the system and students views – I have come to realise that each is incomplete without the presence of the other. Therefore, it would be

worth considering a perspective that would integrate the two views so that the role of universities could be better formulated. Thus, a reconsideration by the OUT of the role that universities maintain globally seems to be essential here.

This also implies that there is a need to integrate the main components of each view and ensure that they are reflected in the mission statement, policies and functions of the OUT. Such integration would need not just to be documented but also to be extended to actual practice.

3.4 Rural Developing Countries, the Need for Distance Education and Studies on Students' Experiences

Since this study is focused on rural students' experiences at the Open University of Tanzania, it is important to describe and discuss the characteristics of rural areas in developing countries. By doing so we should also be able to better understand the nature of students' locations and create a basis for the theoretical framework that follows.

As stated in Chapter One, there are difficulties in defining rural areas because there is no universally agreed mode for their conceptualisation. For this reason, my study reflects on students' geographical locations and not on the population, number of houses, administrative services, building styles and community cohesion, or on the nature of economic activities and the availability of social services, as the literature emphasises (Tacoli 1998, 2000; URT, 2001; Hill, 2003; Arniquez and Stamoulis, 2007; Scott et al, 2007). Therefore, in this study I shall define rural areas as being locations that include those villages and small towns in which students of the Open University of Tanzania live and pursue their studies while isolated from the large urban centres of population.

3.4.1 Characteristics of Rural Areas in Developing Countries

To start with, poverty is argued to be one of the central characteristic features of rural developing countries such as Tanzania (Aikaeli, 2010). Indeed, the incidence of poverty is much higher in rural areas than in urban areas (Khan, 2001; Avila and Gasperini, 2005; Ravillion et al, 2007). This may be associated with the fact that

many people who live in rural areas exist on less than one dollar per day. People in rural areas also experience a poor standard of living, health problems, unequal access to educational opportunities, a high mortality rate, low life expectancy, a lack of electricity and poor communication and telecommunication systems (Khan, 2001; URT, 2001; Sahn and Stifel, 2003; Avila and Gasperini, 2005; Gandhe, 2008; Sugata, 2008).

In addition, people in rural areas in developing countries are dependent on agricultural and non-agricultural activities for their livelihoods (Tacoli, 2004; Carletto et al, 2007). Agricultural activities include food, crops and livestock (Khan, 2001), while rural people also engage in fisheries and forestry (Arniquez and Stamoulis, 2007). However, the majority of rural inhabitants cannot sustain themselves by depending on these agricultural activities as they own only small portions of land.

Khan (2001) argues that some of the rural dwellers sell their labour by farming on other people's land in order to increase the family income. Moreover, the use of crude methods of farming and the change in climatic conditions have had a serious effect on agricultural produce and therefore on the livelihoods of the people (Ellis and Mdoe, 2003; Kelles-Viitanen, 2005; Aikaeli, 2010). For example, the effects of climate change can cause droughts, floods and variations in temperature. These have an adverse effect on individuals in terms of food and income, which, in turn, perpetuates their poverty.

On the other hand, rural people are also involved in non-agricultural activities that involve both waged employment and self-employment (Carletto et al, 2007). For example, this study noted that all the sampled rural students were employed in both the private and public sectors. On top of that they were also engaged in carpentry, agriculture and trading activities. Indeed, students' engagement in such activities meant that they often had inadequate time for their studies. Despite the fact that all the sampled students are currently employed in various sectors, permanent employment is still a worrying factor in rural areas. This has had the effect of

persuading young, energetic individuals to migrate to urban areas in search of greener pastures.

Migration is another alarming feature of rural areas in developing countries. People migrate in search of good jobs, education, wealth, health and infrastructural services (Gould, 1986; James, 1991; URT, 2001; World Bank, 2002; Tacoli, 2004; Bryceson and Mwaipopo 2010). Others migrate for different reasons: because of the income gap and poverty, to seek opportunities for shelter, to go to cultural centres, for advancement, or to work in production and manufacturing industries (Khan, 2001; Tacoli, 2008; Whyte, 2010; World Bank, 2010b). Migration influences the mobility of labour and is partly responsible for poor household problems and low agricultural production (Tacoli, 2004). It is also a cause of social and economic instability within regions.

The presence of distance education as a social component, therefore, could be among the mitigating measures for those who might otherwise migrate to urban areas in search of educational opportunities. Education as a component of social services is a basic right in terms of individual and national development. However, the inadequate access to education pointed out above deters students from receiving their basic human rights and thus curbs the opportunities they have to improve their socio-economic status.

However, such basic rights are not necessarily available to students in developing countries. For instance, studies conducted in rural Pakistan, India, Zambia, Namibia, Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania demonstrate that students in distance education and conventional schools experience the following difficulties: problems in accessing educational materials, poor learning facilities, low student-teacher ratio and poor transport facilities (Jenkins, 1989; Khan, 2001; URT, 2001; Sahn and Stifel, 2003; Gandhe, 2008; Sugata, 2008; Mbukusa, 2009; De Hart and Venter, 2013).

A study conducted in South Africa went further by arguing that the situation is more complicated in rural areas because of the increasing challenges of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment (Lephalala and Makoe, 2012). These problems mean that educational opportunities are currently only available to a few. Similarly, other

studies conducted in rural developing countries argue that the quality of education accessed by students and pupils appears to be low when compared to urban areas (URT, 2001; Avila and Gasperini, 2005; Sugata, 2008).

Moreover, research indicates that rural students lack access to voice, sound, image, text, video and audio communication resources (Lim et al, 2011; Kumar et al, 2011) because of low technology and lack of finance. This is contrary to their colleagues in developed countries like the UK and USA who have good access to communication and interaction services (Sclater, 2008; Macintyre and Macdonald, 2011; Pardasani et al, 2012). Therefore, 'growing' people and improving the quality of education provided in rural areas is an issue that needs to be properly addressed by every nation in the developing world.

The characteristics of rural developing areas discussed above require a number of intervening measures that would help to improve the lives of individuals and communities at large. One immediate measure would be the provision of distance education at the university level in the rural communities. Some reflection on the contribution that distance education could make to the modernisation of rural developing countries is critical at this stage, and is further discussed below.

3.4.2 Potentials of Distance Education in Developing Countries

The characteristics of rural areas in developing countries, as discussed in section 3.4.1, demonstrated that rural people struggle to achieve economic and social development. Distance education has the potential, if well practised, to reduce the existing social, economic, political and cultural challenges experienced in different locations throughout the world (Jenkins, 1989; UNESCO, 2002; Kwapong, 2007; Daniel, 2007; Butcher et al, 2011; Moore and Kearsley, 2012).

For instance, studies conducted in India and Tanzania demonstrates that more than 70% of the population live in rural areas (Gandhe, 2008; Aikaeli, 2010). Therefore, empowering these people is necessary if they are to make a contribution towards the goal of social and economic development. The provision of education through the creation of distance education universities may also help to produce the human

resources that countries such as Tanzania urgently require. Once empowered, people can act as human capital to support the socio-economic strength of the nation and of rural communities at large (Anuwar, 2008).

Distance education is also appreciated for its ability to provide a quality cost-effective education to individuals (Kuhanga, 1990; Rumble, 1997, 2001; Daniel, 2007; Olakulehin and Panda, 2011; Krishnan, 2012). This could enable the majority rural people to access education despite the fact that many have to survive on less than a dollar per day. However, the issue of cost efficiency in distance education is still debatable as reference is usually only made to those costs associated with institutions while less attention is paid to those costs incurred by individual students in their studies.

For example, studies conducted in Malaysia, Zimbabwe and Nigeria show that students incurred the private costs of education for costs in transport, re-registration, Internet connectivity, practical work, course materials, examinations and face-to-face tutorials, although the latter are not compulsory (Belawati, 2006; Bukaliya et al, 2011; Olakulehin and Panda, 2011). Such costs can cause financial hardship to some students, although it is often argued that the economic costs incurred by distance students are comparatively low compared to the costs paid by students at the conventional universities (Olakulehin and Panda, 2011; Krishnan, 2012).

Another positive aspect of distance education is its ability to accommodate students with fewer qualifications than those in the conventional system of education (Juman and Zai, 2009). The strict criteria set for entry into the conventional system limits the number of enrolled students that can enter higher education. I am not of the opinion that distance education enrolls unqualified people, but rather that it provides a second chance for those who failed to gain entry to university due to low performance.

For example, the Open University of Tanzania is offering a one-year foundational course to support students who scored only a low pass mark in their previous educational qualifications. These students can then be admitted to the undergraduate programme once they have passed the foundation course examinations (OUT,

2011c). These opportunities help to widen access to education to more people and also improve the literacy rate of people in developing countries.

The issue of widening access to education is also prevalent in the developing countries. For example, problems of access are often observed among rural people, marginalised women, the disabled and prisoners (Tait, 1995; Kwapong, 2007; Krishnan, 2012). It is in this respect that distance education can make such a difference to those many ordinary people who would never previously have had the opportunity to change their lives through education.

Flexibility in the teaching and learning process is another advantage of distance education as it is flexible in time, space, and as we have seen even in entry qualifications (Rumble, 1989; Keegan, 1996; Daniel, 2007; Juman and Zai, 2009). Accommodating large numbers of students in the conventional system sometimes proves difficult due to the limited physical space and human resources available.

However, the situation is different in distance education as students study away from their institutions and need only be supervised by a few tutors - given an efficient university infrastructure. Moreover, the flexibility observed in distance education enables students to continue with their studies while engaged in other socio-economic activities. Such a potential is not usually available in the conventional system as students attend studies on a full-time basis.

Therefore, distance education can offer a number of opportunities to people living in developing countries: flexibility in teaching, cost effectiveness, developing human capital and the potential of widening access to education, particularly to the unreached and marginalised rural communities. Regarding my discussion on the characteristics of rural developing countries in section 3.4.1 above, it is possible to improve the existing socio-economic situation and widen access to education to the majority, but only if the potentials of distance education are fully realised.

3.4.3 Studies on Students' Experiences in Distance Education

My search of the literature in this area revealed that there is little documentation of students' experiences in rural areas. Many of the studies undertaken have a western

orientation which necessarily takes a different perspective on the culture, the available support, the learning resources and on the media and technology available and accessible to students and tutors. In emphasising the existing differences between developed and developing countries, for example, Lephalala and Makoe (2012) argue that African residential areas lack many of the necessary facilities such as libraries, telephones, electricity, access to computers and reliable postal services. This is unlike the experiences of students in the developed world, as I shall describe in section 3.4.4 below.

The few studies available on developing countries do, however, provide some data regarding students' locations in rural and urban areas. These two areas (rural and urban) are never equal as they differ in social, economic and infrastructure development (Khan, 2000, 2001; Cohen, 2004; Tacoli 2008; Bryceson and Mwaipopo 2010; Leewan, 2010; Whyte, 2010). This makes it difficult to generalize findings without separating both locations, as the disparities between rural and urban areas in developing countries can affect the interpretation of findings. Since there is little documentation in distance education with regard to the rural areas of developing countries, it is important that this current study attempts to fill the gap.

The next section discusses studies regarding students' experiences in distance higher education in both developing and developed countries. The purpose is to establish where the gaps are and to identify methodological issues that require further exploration.

3.4.4 Students' Experiences in Teaching and Learning

This section draws from the few studies on students' experiences in developing and developed countries and discusses them in detail. To start with, Purnell, Cuskelly and Danaher (1996) conducted a study on improving distance education for university students in Queensland, Australia. The study covered rural and urban locations and examined the difficulties students faced, while also looking at ways of improving the quality of delivery. Focus group discussions and interviews were used as data collection methods in this qualitative study.

The study discovered that interaction was a significant source of students' success in both rural and urban areas. It was revealed that students appreciated the personal support offered by tutors by telephone, and were also impressed by the audio cassettes and video tapes that supplemented their study materials. However, it was noted that rural students felt disadvantaged in comparison to urban students; for example, they complained about insufficient access to learning resources which affected their studies and their ability to obtain high grades.

The issue of failure to access adequate resources among rural students was also an issue in South Africa where students felt overlooked, marginalised and socially deprived by their institutions (Lephalala and Makoe, 2012). However, the study by Purnell et al (1996) in Queensland, above, suggested the following ideas: widening access to tutors with distance education skills; applying technology to facilitate students' learning; and considering the needs of those students who are geographically isolated. These proposed measures would enhance effective interaction with students, motivate students to learn and provide access to academic guidance and feedback, all of which are crucial in sustaining students' academic progress.

Another study that examined students' experiences in rural and urban areas was conducted at the University of South Pacific by Landbeck and Mugler (2000). This study was done with 78 extension students and used interviews to generate information. The study found that students adopted only a surface approach to learning, influenced largely by their overdependence on the course study materials provided by the University. In addition, the students observed experienced inadequate basic resources such as books and tutor support in guidance, correction and answering questions.

The experience of students at the University of South Pacific differs from that of the students at Queensland, Australia, as presented by Purnell et al (1996), above. The study by Purnell et al (1996) above indicate that students were provided with course materials that were supplemented by recorded learning materials such as audio cassettes and video tapes. This suggests that the provision of course materials alone

was inadequate to facilitate students' learning and the development of their skills, competencies and knowledge. Instead, supplementing the course materials with other forms of academic support such as access to tutors, learning materials and library resources would help students to fully realise their academic potential.

The study conducted by Landbeck and Mugler (2000) above also indicates the disparity between rural and urban students. The study noted that students in urban areas were comfortable in using audio-or video tapes, although this was not the case among students in rural areas who had limited access to electricity. The absence of electricity forced rural students to continue to rely upon the course materials provided by their institution. In attempting to rectify the situation, the study recommended the strengthening of face-to-face interaction among students and tutors.

The experience derived from the study conducted at the University of South Pacific is significant as it captured the wider context of rural and urban areas. However, it is challenged by the fact that it had only one source of data (the students) and one method (the interview) which limited the opportunity to discover rich and more descriptive data. For validity purposes, this study could have engaged in other research methods such as observation and documentation and also widened its sampling scope for data triangulation purposes.

Another interesting study on students' experiences was conducted by Srivastava and Reddy (2007). This study examined the experiences of graduate students at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). The purpose was to discover factors that contributed to the successful completion of students' studies. The study looked at instructional methods, support services and study habits. Questionnaires and interviews were used as data collection methods. The study revealed that the successful completion of studies by students depended upon a combination of factors, which included: learning materials, assignments, face-to-face support, regional centres, peer groups, guidance from counsellors and access to library services.

The study noted that students were not really interested in using e-mail, teleconferencing or radio counselling. However, their inflexibility caused them to depend on printed self-learning materials and non-technological support. Perhaps this was influenced by the low access they had to technology and by their own educational backgrounds. Despite students' use of non-technological support systems at IGNOU, the study noted that very few students completed their studies on time.

The study conducted at IGNOU recommended the following actions to be taken in order to improve the students' situations: empower students to develop knowledge, the use of media to facilitate students' learning, an emphasis on induction and a focus on continuous evaluation. While these suggestions are significant in perhaps enhancing the academic prospects of students, they are also inadequate as they only focus on the institutional context, forgetting that students occupy multiple spaces at the same time. Indeed, other places, such as the home and the work place, for example, can also negatively affect students' learning outcomes.

Therefore, consideration of factors such as students' educational backgrounds, their personal living contexts, their social and economic activities and the extent to which they are engaged in learning within their own locations could provide a more comprehensive picture of the reasons for low graduate rates at IGNOU. An examination of each, or all, of these aspects would have helped academics to understand why these students failed to finish their course on time.

A study with a rural orientation was conducted with undergraduate and postgraduate students at an Australian university (Owens et al, 2009). It explored the experience of remote students in the period 2003-2007. The study solicited information from 49 student participants through the use of 45-minute semi-structured telephone interviews. The study noted that all of the students who participated in the study used computers that were accessible within the university and at their homes.

Despite the access to media and technology within students' locations, the findings indicated that students experienced a number of difficulties in relation to Internet services, satellite connections and costs. They also occasionally received emails or had online discussions and telephone calls. These technological difficulties show that

the use of technology in teaching and learning is not free of challenges. The findings also indicated that the high postage costs affected the sending and subsequent delivery of study materials. Students also felt isolated and lacked orientation compared to on-campus students.

Regardless of the challenges, Owens et al (2009) did report that most distance students received adequate library support and appreciated the role of mentors in reducing their feelings of isolation. Moreover, the University provided *elive* sessions and conducted course review sessions that attempted to meet the students' needs.

The study conducted by Owens et al (2009) at the Australian university (through telephoning) lacked the visual cues suitable for further probing in qualitative research (Marshall and Rossman, 2006; Cohen et al, 2011). Collecting data through face-to-face interviews enables researchers to establish a closer relationship with students and to understand visual cues (the student's body language, for example) that might provide further useful information. Moreover, the use of multiple sources of methods such as documents and observation would have been useful in supplementing the information that was missed in the interviews.

Mbukusa (2009) conducted a study in Namibia which explored barriers facing remote students at the Centre for External Studies at the University of Namibia. This qualitative study focused on six students who had dropped out from their Bachelor of Education and basic education Teachers' Diploma courses. The study adopted a case study approach and used research diaries, documents and interviews for data collection purposes. The study discovered that students experienced inadequate access to academic support which meant that their academic needs were unmet. They were also faced with poor infrastructure issues and other administrative problems.

The study by Mbukusa (2009) above made the following proposals: the enhancement of effective interaction; decentralising support to the regional centres; and the provision of social support in order to facilitate the education of students. A number of other recommendations were also made: an improvement in media facilities; the provision of policy issues relating to ICT; the creation of rural infrastructure; and the effective use of resources for the benefit of rural students. The research design and

methods adopted for data collection were compatible with the needs of the study. However, a comparative approach between continuing students and student dropouts might have provided more revealing results which, in turn, might have helped to improve support practices within the university.

Another study on rural areas was conducted with students of the Open University in the UK who lived in Scotland (Macintyre and Macdonald, 2011). It focused on students' perceptions and their feelings of remoteness and identity. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and utilized semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions as data collection methods. Twenty students were sampled and interviewed in telephone interviews that lasted for 20-30 minutes. Interviewees were then invited to group discussions that took place in nearby centres.

Macintyre and Macdonald (2011) discovered that each student had access at home to learning facilities such as Internet services and laptops. Their learning was facilitated by online meetings, emails, telephone services and face-to-face discussions. Therefore, students had strong interaction with their course tutors and colleagues, although their feelings of remoteness were aggravated by other factors such as poor roads and uncertain transport services.

Such experiences can be compared to the study conducted in the USA where university students opted for distance education courses because of the problems of transport and inflexible course schedules in other systems of education (Pardasani et al, 2012). Students decided to study programmes that were offered through teleconferencing (video conferencing with online media). However, the study reveals that students experienced emotional disconnectedness as they would have preferred to bond with their peers through face-to-face interaction. This could be considered as a barrier to the effective use of technology as individuals' particular needs might not be met by the particular solutions that technology offers.

Macintyre and Macdonald (2011), above, proposed to continue peer interaction and recommended the establishment of social groups and local examination centres near students' locations so as to reduce the problem of transport. These recommendations are relevant ones as they help to develop a sense of belonging among students and

might enable students to share their learning and social experiences with each other. The suggested strategies could also be useful in rural developing countries where students experience high levels of isolation due to their infrequent interaction with peers and tutors (Ngengebule, 2008; Kangai et al, 2011).

The findings from the study conducted in the developed world by Owens et al (2009) and Macintyre and Macdonald (2011) differ significantly from studies on students' experiences in developing countries. The main differences are related to modern technology and how students in rural areas can gain relevant access to it. For example, studies conducted in Indonesia (Rye and Zubaidah, 2008), South Africa (Lephalala and Makoe, 2012) and Tanzania (Mahai, 2012) show that students lacked the skills to use ICT properly, while their access to the Internet was limited and suffered from poor transmission quality.

Moreover, Rye and Zubaidah (2008) went further by explaining that the available Internet services in Indonesia were limited to commercial centres and students' offices, unlike the studies conducted in Australia and Scotland where students had access to Internet services in various locations, including at home and in the established study centres (Owens et al, 2009; Macintyre and Macdonald, 2011). Such differences demonstrate the existing technological gap between the developing and developed worlds.

Despite the technological challenges that the developing countries face, universities such as Mozambique and Cape Verde are now using online learning to teach their students (Ramos et al, 2011). However, the infrastructural limitations mean that they also use traditional methods such as radio broadcasting, face-to-face tutor support and printed learning materials alongside their online learning provision. That is to say that these universities have adopted a system of blended learning to enhance the effective provision of education to their students.

The use of blended learning by the Universities of Cape Verde and Mozambique demonstrated above has the potential to enable students and tutors to interact through more than one medium of communication: for example, it is flexible as it allows students to study at their own selected time; it provides consistency in accessing

learning resources; and it improves students' ability to communicate in verbal and written forms (Rennie, 2003). The use of blended learning can also develop a sense of community and belonging among students and support higher levels of learning through critical discourse and reflective thinking (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004: 98).

The last study to be examined in this section was a study on distance higher education in Tanzania. This study was conducted by Bhalalusesa in 1998. The sample for the study included continuing students, dropouts, tutors and regional managers. The study adopted a qualitative approach, while interviews, focus group discussions and documentary reviews were used as data collection methods. The findings revealed poor infrastructure, inadequate financial resources, a poor learning environment and a shortage of qualified tutors, all of which restricted the effective provision of education at the OUT.

To reduce the challenges encountered by students at the OUT, Bhalalusesa (1998) proposed the following strategies: improve the students' support systems at the regional centres; strengthen the University's management system; improve the quality of correspondence tuition; and invest in media and technology. The study also proposed that further research should be carried out on retention mechanisms, on support for remote and isolated students, on women's experiences of studying at the OUT, on the cost effectiveness of distance education in Tanzania and on improving students' study skills. The purpose was to continue to improve the quality of students' experiences as they undertook their studies.

The research carried out by Bhalalusesa (1998) was significant in terms of this thesis as it could act as a basis for further exploration of rural students' experiences at the OUT. The researcher's use of qualitative methods in understanding students' experiences was also critical as it provided rich data to inform decisions. Issues regarding support services for students in rural and geographically-remote areas of Tanzania proved challenging and the study proposed that further investigation on this issue could be undertaken. However, if observations of the students' learning environment (which is not among the data collection methods) had been carried out,

then it might have added useful information that could have helped to improve practices.

Moreover, the findings by Bhalalusesa (1998) above only concentrate on the practices within the OUT. If the study had been extended to observe students' experiences at their homes, in their communities or at work, it would have provided more insight into their lives and on issues related to support services. As it has been over ten years since the study on students' experiences was conducted at the Open University of Tanzania, it might be worth revisiting but with a focus on rural areas. It is in this area that the literature on developing countries demonstrates a gap in knowledge.

3.4.5 Gender and Students' Experiences in Distance Education

The review of literature carried out in my study observed that there are only a few studies that focus on gender and its influence on the educational practices of students in distance education in developing countries (Bhalalusesa, 2001; Taplin and Jegede, 2001; Mhehe, 2002). In fact, the few available studies focus mainly on the experiences of female students rather than their male counterparts.

For example, studies of female students' experiences in Tanzania (Bhalalusesa, 2001; Mhehe, 2002), Malawi (Banda, 2004) and Zimbabwe (Gudhlanga et al, 2012) reveal that the women experienced institutional, socio-cultural and personal challenges that restricted their ability to study successfully in distance education. Culturally, an African woman is expected to consider her marital and family role as being most important (Mhehe, 2002). This means that a woman's studies may have to take second or even third place in importance. Failure to comply with the cultural demands of her society could lead to isolation and humiliation at the hands of her husband, relatives and community members.

Female students in a similar context are also expected to manage domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children (Mhehe, 2002; Kwapong, 2007; Mensa et al, 2008). These duties add to the constraints that female students have to deal with when trying to study. Studies also indicate that female students

who study within such an environment experience stress, low concentration levels and do not have enough time to study (Mensa et al, 2008).

In addition to the socio-cultural practices described above, studies also indicate that the institutions providing distance education also appear to de-motivate and demoralise female students from accessing such an education (Mhehe, 2002). For example, the policies created by institutions do not reflect the need to provide sufficient support to female students as they have different needs than their male counterparts, who also have fewer socio-cultural barriers to overcome in pursuing their studies (Mhehe, 2002; Gudhlanga et al, 2012).

Studies in conventional and in distance education seem to have commonalities in terms of recommended strategies to reduce the challenges faced by female students in their studies regardless of the differences in practice. For example, Jimma University in Ethiopia proposed the provision of tutorial classes, financial support, orientation, guidance and gender awareness training to full-time female students (Melese and Fenta, 2009: 18). Similar studies in distance education proposed the following: guidance and counselling, strengthening financial support mechanisms at the institutional level, developing self-help course materials, the introduction of tutorial classes and the creation of policies that would favour female students in their studies (Prummer, 2000; Mhehe, 2002; Mensa et al, 2008; Gudhlanga et al, 2012).

However, a study conducted by Mensa et al (2008) in Ghana rejected the idea of conducting face-to-face tutorials by saying that female students have less time to attend the sessions. While this is logical, other factors such as location, access to learning resources and students' abilities to study independently may also have an influence on an individual's decision to participate in a face-to-face tutorial or not. Mensa et al (2008) also emphasise the use of ICT which would incorporate the needs of female students within their locations.

These suggestions seem realistic in managing issues related to the teaching and learning support of female students. Proposals such as the use of ICT, developing self-taught materials and access to guidance and counselling could effectively reduce the challenges facing female students, if managed properly. Indeed, similar proposals

could work just as well when used by male students. While there are role differences that might affect female students' academic progress, as emphasised by the authors above this does not necessarily warrant the conclusion that female students require more specialised support than male students.

For example, a study conducted at Indira Ghandhi National Open University (IGNOU) argues that support services are not gender specific as both sets of students require one form of support or another to make progress in their studies (Sen and Samdup, 2009). A further study conducted at the University of Hong Kong revealed that both low and high student achievers, whether male or female, required tutor and peer support to facilitate their learning at a distance (Taplin and Jegede, 2001).

The studies presented in this section do not seem to be very context sensitive. This might lead to the conclusion that they are too general in nature and have not given enough consideration to the variations in rural and urban areas, which are very different, as I have argued in section 3.4.3. I have also discussed in the same section that there are insufficient studies on students' experiences in the rural areas of developing countries. In addition, the issue of gender roles and their influence on the education of male and female students is an important dimension that requires further exploration in this study.

3.4.6 The Research Gap

This section explores the gap in knowledge left by the studies on the student experience referred to here. The studies discussed in this section suggest that students have had varying experiences in distance learning. Studies from developed countries show that students access support services more through online interaction than by face-to-face interaction. This seems to be one of the most distinctive trends in the recent development of distance education globally.

I have argued in section 3.2.3 that the current debate in distance education centres mainly on online teaching, learning and support. However, this is not the focus of the current study as technology is not the main mode of teaching in developing

countries. As I have argued previously, the infrastructural challenges and the low level of development in developing countries limits the effective use of technology in distance education.

The most common way of teaching in developing countries is based on traditional methods that use print, audio and some forms of audio visual media (Aderinoye et al, 2009; Sharma, 2011). It is argued that:

“if students are still reading by candles and kerosene lamps, expecting them to learn online may not be realistic” (Wright et al, 2009: 2).

This example exposes the serious limitations that exist when attempting to use technology in teaching situations in developing countries. There is an undeniable gap here which demonstrates the digital divide between developing and developed countries. This challenge encouraged Zhao et al (2005) to emphasize the presence and influence of human support, especially in digitally marginalized areas.

It is important to understand how students study and interact with tutors and peers in rural developing countries, where technological problems have yet to be fully addressed. Moreover, studies on students’ experiences have established the need to carry out research in rural areas as most of the research findings observed in section 3.4.4 and 3.4.5 above do not adequately distinguish the rural from the urban area. In addition, some of the specific studies of rural areas have a western orientation that is unsuited to developing countries. There is therefore an urgent need to explore rural students’ experiences in developing countries, and to use the knowledge gained from these experiences to improve support practices.

For example, Zawacki-Richter (2009) contacted 25 professionals from the field of distance education in order to identify important areas that required further attention in improving students’ experiences. The participants were drawn from Australia, China, Fiji, the UK, Brazil, Canada, Ireland, Germany, New Zealand and South Africa. Participants were contacted via email to propose ten areas which they thought to be important in distance education. They were then sent questionnaires which required them to rank the areas proposed from high to low. The study noted that

interaction and communication, equity and ethics, innovation and change and student support services were ranked highly as important research areas to be considered in distance education.

Similarly, Zawacki-Richter et al (2009) reviewed 695 research articles from five prominent distance education journals with the purpose of categorizing and identifying the least emphasized research areas. The articles were divided into three levels: macro (distance education system and theories); meso (management, organization, and technology); and micro (teaching and learning). It was discovered that studies focusing on the micro level were over-represented and mostly used qualitative research. The under-representation of studies on students' support services was included at the meso level. Surprisingly, more than 80% of the articles sampled were from developed countries, leaving developing countries under-represented. The exploration of rural students' experiences in this current study is intended to assist in reflecting on the needs and the nature of the support services that students require, and lead to recommendations that will help to improve current practices.

3.5 The Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework of a study guides the way of seeing and thinking about the particular phenomenon being interrogated (Anfara and Mertz, 2006). In this section I present the two aspects of my theoretical framework: first, I discuss theories of distance education; I then move on to describe my use of Bourdieu's social field theory (1977, 1990) as the conceptual framework for the study.

I shall first explore theories within the context of distance education. This will assist in identifying the theoretical gap and thus create a stage for adopting Bourdieu's framework.

3.5.1 Theories in Distance Education

In this section I will focus on two areas: the theory of transactional distance (Moore, 1993) and a system view model of distance education (Kearsley and Moore, 1996). These have been widely used in various studies in distance education. It is, therefore,

imperative that the weaknesses and strengths of these two theories should be examined in some depth.

The theory of transactional distance was developed by Moore in 1993. Its purpose was to describe the psychological and communication problems that are experienced due to the geographical separation between students, tutors and the institutions to which they are attached. The extent of psychological and communication distance is what Moore calls 'transactional distance'. This theory rejects the idea that distance exists in physical terms and argues that it exists only psychologically and communicatively. The theory hypothesizes that transactional distance is mainly influenced by dialogue, structure and student autonomy.

The theory postulates that the transactional distance is high when the educational programmes undertaken are highly structured and the teacher-learner dialogue is non-existent (Moore, 1993: 27). Programmes are highly-structured in the sense that students are provided with course materials that are designed and prepared by their institutions to guide learning in the absence of teachers. Students are believed to exercise autonomy as they work through the guided learning provided by these materials. However, it is reasonable to ask: how do students learn to be autonomous in the first place?

The theory also argues that transactional distance is considered to be low when dialogue is encouraged and when few pre-determined structures exist (Moore, 1991). This hypothesis emphasizes that dialogue is a key factor in the reduction of the psychological and communicative distance experienced among students. Moore (1989) argues that in order for learning to take place in distance education there should be three forms of interaction: student-tutor, student-student and student-content. Hillman et al (1994) added a further form, that of 'student-interface' to reflect technological advancement.

Interaction among individuals, content and ICT may also help to improve students' experiences and at the same time to reduce the transactional distance. Indeed, dialogue enables students to actively engage and participate in learning (Holmberg, 1989; Moore, 1989). Gokool-Ramdoo (2008) commented that the theory of

transactional distance carries a generational advantage. This is associated with the development of 21st century technological applications that emphasize interaction through the use of media.

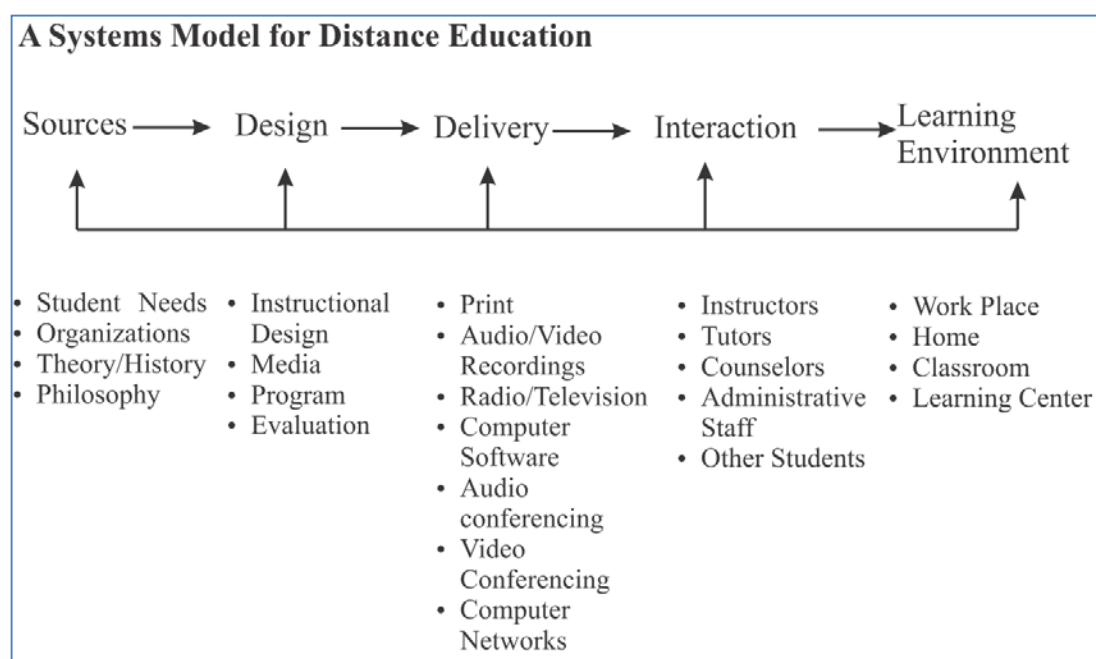
This theory seems to be a relevant one as it provides a pedagogical structure and framework for understanding the teaching and learning practices in distance education (Garrison; 2000; Saba, 2000; Giossos et al, 2009; Falloon, 2011). It reminds teachers and institutions of methods and media that can help reduce transactional distance. Moreover, the theory prompts tutors to apply teaching strategies that call for facilitation and guidance in order to allow for greater autonomy in students' learning.

Nevertheless, it can also be said that the theory has not managed to describe how students can become more autonomous and independent in their learning. Responses from adult learning literature posit that in order for students to gain autonomy and independence in learning, they require support in one form or another as they face personal and situational factors (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991). The support can originate from tutors, administrators, immediate families, employers, friends and fellow students.

In addition, students have academic and non-academic problems that may limit them from fulfilling their roles as autonomous and independent learners, especially if they are not properly supported. This suggests that we cannot remove the aspect of interaction between students and tutors, and then expect students to fully function on their own (Holmbergh, 1989). The theory of transactional distance is also argued to lack an empirical base from which it can affirm its claims (Gosky and Caspi, 2005; Giossos et al, 2009).

The Systems Model of Distance Education

The system view theory of distance education was proposed by Moore and Kearsley (1996). This theory posits a number of subsystems that support practices in distance education. These subsystems include: sources of knowledge, design, delivery, interaction and learning environment, the components of which are presented below in diagrammatic form.



Source: Moore (1996: 9)

Figure 2: Components of the System view in Distance Education

The theory starts with sources of knowledge that take into consideration students' needs, philosophy, organizations and history so that the system can operate successfully. Course design is a second component that is constructed by a team of experts who prepare and structure material so that it can be used by any tutor within the system. The process also includes instructional design, media, programmes and evaluation. The third component is the mode of delivery which includes print and non-print materials, while a fourth component is the process of interaction facilitated by counselors, instructors, tutors, administrators and other students. These individuals help to facilitate the progressive learning of students within their environment. The final element is that of the learning environment in which students

study. The components in a system view are believed to be interdependent with each other (Moore and Kearsley, 1996).

The components of the system view theory appear to be significant factors in the enhancement of the teaching and learning process in distance education. In fact, each component is useful in the planning and executing of teaching and learning outcomes. For example, the components demonstrated in the figure 2 above remind educational providers what to consider when planning and executing course programmes, especially as there are occasional claims that the providers' main focus is often on course design, while other important components are disregarded (Lockwood, 1995; Simpson, 2000, 2002).

Indeed, components such as academic and non-academic support systems that help students to learn are often less considered. But the system view seems to be comprehensive as it considers needs, media, the multiple spaces that students occupy and the human and physical resources required to facilitate learning at a distance.

Moreover, the system view is relevant as it provides a theoretical overview of the field of distance education, which is crucial when orienting new people in the field and regulating efficiency (Saba, 1999; Du Mont, 2005). In addition, the components may also act as a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of distance education from an institutional point of view (Moore and Kearsley, 1996).

However, the theory is open to criticism because of its inflexible nature (Du Mont, 2005). The components stated in Figure 2 above appear to be structured and static as they cannot operate in isolation. These components are coiled in a chain that tends to synthesize their dependency, while there is no feedback loop because the chain itself seems to be linear. This does not allow for the flexibility that teaching and learning in distance education requires (Du Mont, 2005), especially given the diversity of the group of students it attracts.

Conclusion: limitations of these theories

Why did I not apply the theory of transactional distance and the systems view in the current study? The system view theory is an important one when assessing the

overall function of an institution; however, this is not the goal of this study. Likewise, the theory of transactional distance emphasizes communicative and psychological distance. While these are important aspects of distance learning the theory itself excludes actual (physical) distance, which I believe to be an important factor in the distance education culture of developing countries.

For example, my study found that rural students in Tanzania had to travel long distances in search of support services as all the regional centres and tutors of the OUT were urban-based. In this context, it is the actual (physical) distance that separates students from these resources and causes them to experience psychological frustration and a sense of isolation. Therefore, if the actual distance is excluded then this must surely limit the theory to a particular context and situation.

Another reason for not using these existing theories in distance education is related to their lack of rigour and general applicability (Keegan, 1988; Holmberg, 1989; Schlosser and Anderson, 1994; Garrison, 2000; Gokool-Ramdoo, 2008). The lack of an accepted theory has weakened distance education; there has been a lack of identity, a sense of belonging to the periphery and the lack of a touchstone by which decisions about methods, media, financing and student support can be made with confidence when they do have to be made (Keegan, 1986: 63).

However, I do wish to look outside the boundaries of distance education and borrow concepts of habitus and field from sociological theory. These concepts had been applied in various other contexts, including that of education (Grenfell and James, 1998). I consider these theoretical constructs to be powerful tools in researching and understanding practices in an educational context (Grenfell and James, 1998; Mutch, 2006; Rawolle and Lingard, 2008) and in distance education in particular (Makoe, 2006).

3.5.2 Bourdieu's Theoretical Concepts

This study adopted the analytic tools of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. To meet the aims of the study it was necessary to explore and examine the thoughts, perceptions and actions that individual rural distance students developed after long

exposure to various practices across the academic, domestic and rural fields within which they were embedded. Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus and field were selected as they help us understand the experiences of individuals and their life trajectories in the social world (Grenfell, 2007). Moreover, it is argued that one cannot gain insight into an individual's social existence unless one becomes absorbed in its reality (Bourdieu, 1993).

While my study focused in particular on two specific concepts – habitus and field – the concepts of capital and practice were also included as the four terms are tightly related. Bourdieu contends that $((\text{habitus}) \times (\text{capital})) + \text{field} = \text{practice}$ (Bourdieu cited by Grenfell, 2008: 51), emphasising that it is not possible to talk of habitus and fields without reflecting on the social, cultural and economic capital that are central to their relationship (Bourdieu, 1986; Nolan, 2012; Hurst, 2013). Similarly, the practices in the field assist in the shaping, guiding and positioning of habitus.

Habitus

Habitus is considered to be formed through conditioning in a field of practice; it is a bodily 'disposition' formed through practices and everyday experiences in individuals' social contexts (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus is associated with thoughts, feelings, perceptions, appreciations, actions and dispositions. These traits are restructured to suit the field in which they operate due to exposure, engagement and participation. In this study, questions related to the habitus of the rural students were related to the ways in which the students perceive, describe and orient themselves to the teaching and learning processes at the OUT. For example: what effect does their particular habitus as rurally-located distance students have on their success or failure in the academic field?

Moreover, habitus is developed after a long attachment and exposure to a social field. In this manner, the concept was used as a way of providing insight into students' characteristics and their social and economic backgrounds in the rural context. I assumed that the academic history of students may inform their habitus and their orientation towards the OUT as they struggle to adjust and assume positions in the academic field. It could be argued that this necessitates the structuring and

restructuring of their past experiences in order to adapt to the new practices of teaching and learning that they experience as distance learners. In so doing, students would face individual challenges and may develop various needs as they assume roles in the field and learn how to play the 'game' of distance learning. Understanding the complexities of these students' habitus would provide insights into their particular needs and challenges, and offer a way of describing and analyzing the nature of the OUT's response to students' needs via the support frameworks available.

Habitus may not isolate itself from the social and cultural context of where it has been formed – in the rural, academic, and domestic fields - which are the main areas of study for this research. The patterns and structures of its formation can form part of the students' day-to-day activities and highlights their attitudes towards study. Habitus in the context of this study provides a rewarding way of describing and investigating the multiple factors that influence students' decisions to study at the OUT and sustain their motivation to learn.

Fields

Bourdieu describes fields as signifying structured activities and practices in social space (Bourdieu, 1990), while Grenfell (2007) and Swartz (1997) contend that a field is a structured social space which includes factors that shape the behaviours of the agencies that occupy positions within them. Fields as emphasized by Bourdieu are formed in relation to each other as they strengthen the habitus and ensure the logic of practice (Grenfell and James, 1998). The fields formed are multiple and exist as macro and micro fields.

A good example of field formation can be drawn from Hardy and Lingard (2008), who explored the influence of policy in teacher education during reforms in the state of Queensland, Australia. In their study they described a field of teachers' work and a policy field. Both fields were guided by practices from the National Education and Quality policy (a macro field). A further example can also be drawn from Nolan (2012), who applied Bourdieu's social field theory to observe classroom discourse through the experiences of prospective mathematics teachers.

Nolan (2012) described two fields: the field of the mathematics classroom, where teachers apply the skills they have learned, and the field of university teacher education, where teachers were trained in those skills. Grenfell and James (1998: 20) considered the field of education to be a macro field, while primary, secondary and higher education were seen as micro fields, although both were also linked to media, health and industry fields. The studies highlighted here and in the previous section support Bourdieu's idea of the formulation of multiple fields which are in structural relation to each other.

These fields are believed to have their own logic of practice (i.e. rules, norms and principles) which are different from those in the other fields (Bourdieu, 1990; Johnson, 1993; Hurst, 2013). However, fields do not exist in isolation from each other (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1989; Bourdieu, 1990). This study defined academic, rural and domestic fields as micro fields, while globalization, economics and national educational policies were considered to be macro fields.

Macro Fields

As a macro field, globalization acts as a mirror for distance education practices at the OUT. For example, in global terms, distance education aims at widening access, both locally and internationally, and this is done by pioneering cross-border education and through the extensive use of media in teaching and learning. Similar practices are being undertaken in Tanzania where the OUT offers education to urban and marginalized rural students, while at the same time it has extended its borders to include other countries within the African continent (OUT, 2009a, 2011a, 2012a).

National educational policy as a macro field allows the study to observe the functions of the OUT through the lens of national policies such as the Tanzanian Education policy, the Higher Education policy and the Tanzania National Vision, 2025.

Finally, the economic field as a macro field foregrounds the economic powers of individual students in the rural context. The 'survival' rate of these students is dependent on their economic strength, and on whether they are employed or self-employed in either the formal or non-formal sectors. The ability of students to access

economic capital so that they can meet their day-to-day expenses and pay for their education is, therefore, paramount. The economic field can thus make either a positive or negative contribution to the learning outcomes of OUT distance students in rural areas.

I have considered gender as a cross-cutting issue surrounding the identified macro fields of this study. The issue of gender goes beyond the biological description of female and male, and the categorization of boy, girl, woman and man (West and Zimmerman, 1987). It relates to the cultural and social phenomena that are reflected in the division of labour and activities appropriate to one's sexual category (Throne and Luria, 1986; West and Zimmerman, 1987).

In principle, distance education includes male and female students who have different socio-economic, biological and cultural roles to perform in their surroundings. However, as these roles may act as barriers towards students' effective participation in their studies, this study believed that some reflection on the issue of gender would be relevant.

Micro Fields

The academic field, the rural field and the domestic field are the micro fields described in this study. The academic field is the Open University of Tanzania, embracing teaching, support and the various processes and products of programme administration. Students, tutors and administrators are agents in this field and they possess the cultural and social capital that adds value to the field.

The domestic field is the home where students live and conduct their education as distance students. Students also participate in community and cultural activities and in their various areas of employment, which come together in what I have described in this study as the rural field.

The fields created operate in association with each other in spite of differences in their formation. Students move between fields in the course of their learning. Students' mediation throughout these fields may bring challenges and struggles due

to the different rules and regulations that are prevalent in these fields and the way in which they affect students' progress.

However, Bourdieu emphasizes that there is a 'relation of knowledge' and a 'relation of conditioning' that exists between habitus and fields (Grenfell and James, 1998). The relation of conditioning is associated with the fields' ability to condition the habitus and structure its pre-conceived practices so that it can cope with new rules of the game. The relation of knowledge is associated with agents' values and knowledge that are considered worthy in order for them to invest in the field. This demonstrates that habitus and field are dependent on each other as the absence of one affects the functionality of the other. To give an example: the OUT cannot exist without students. However, students cannot attain their goals (coping with the rules of the game) without accessing the proper structures, tutors and support from the OUT (which, in turn, affects their habitus).

Bourdieu (1990) also argues that fields are surrounded by forces and struggles. The forces that are employed in the field are predominantly capital-oriented. The forms of capital at stake include social, economic and cultural capital. These struggles or forces are constantly caused by the fact that resources (capital) are scarce.

This study observed the resources (capital) available in the field that facilitated students' learning at a distance. It also explored students' possession of social, economic and cultural capital in relation to their ability to assume positions in the field and sustain their studies. The study also examined students' capital in relation to status, social networking, financial status, academic knowledge, the language of communication, and access to, and the availability of learning resources in the rural field.

Capital in the academic field was also viewed in terms of the cultural capital possessed by tutors who have the credentials to teach, guide, network and support students in their learning. The study reviewed documents that revealed economic capital in the academic field, observing the exchange of social and cultural capital between students and tutors, and among students. As the OUT is in a developing country that faces social and economic challenges, its economic capital was

considered against its ability to provide learning materials, resources and tutor support. The theoretical framework, therefore, helped me to explore the following areas: the difficulties faced by students, their coping strategies, their modes of learning and communication in different fields, the support services available in these fields, students' perceptions, the social history of students and what influence this had on their activities in the academic field.

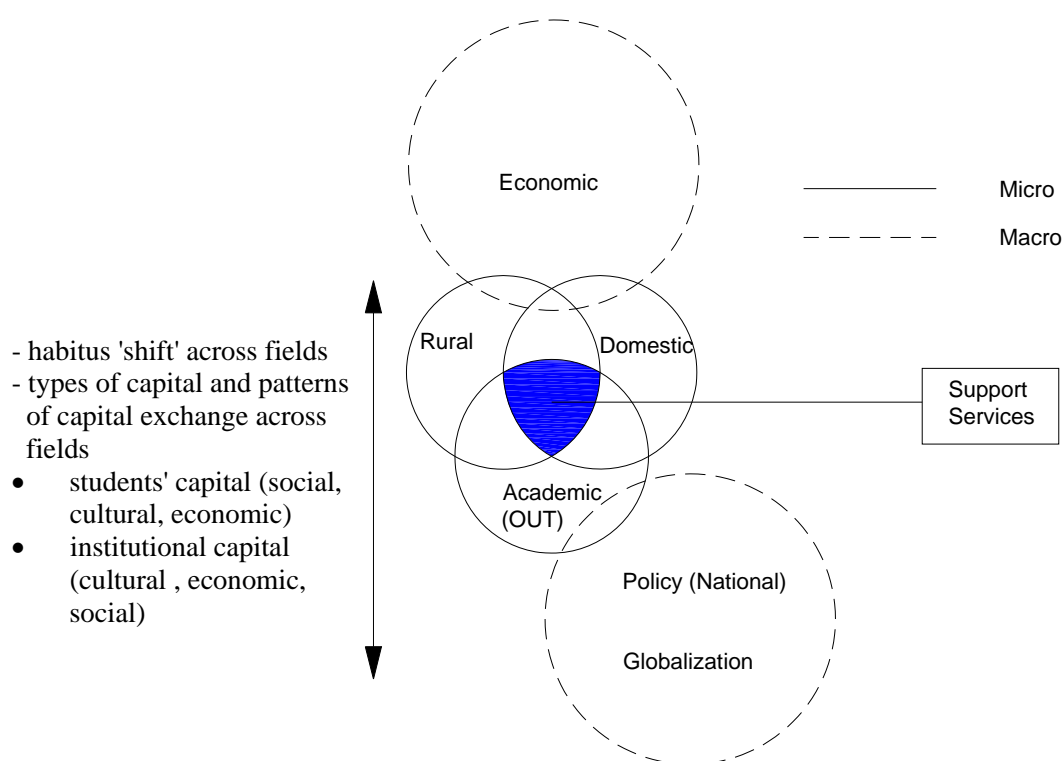


Figure 3: The Theoretical Framework of the Study

3.5.3 Critiques of Bourdieu's Concepts

Bourdieu's concepts have been criticised as being deterministic and subjective (Jenkins, 1992; Swart, 1993). Regarding the charge of determinism, habitus is seen in this way because its development depends on practices in the field. It is the individual engagement with objective structures in the fields that enables them to develop schemes of perception, feeling and action. This means habitus and field are related terms and do not exist in isolation. Bourdieu's response to the criticism of being deterministic was to argue that habitus is not static and does not determine practice, but instead it produces practice through invention and interaction with the field (Bourdieu, 1990: 63).

Moreover, Bourdieu's terms are claimed not to consider agency or 'self-choice', as individuals are subject to objective practices in the field and in culture (Nash, 1990). The argument regarding the lack of self-choice is associated with the fact that Bourdieu considers habitus as operating between the unconscious and subconscious state (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). This neglects the fact that human beings as social actors are free to decide, choose, determine, discover, object and participate in activities taking place in the social world, regardless of their pre-conceived structures. These traits are possessed by agents who occupy space in the social fields and unintentionally bind the scope of the habitus.

Therefore, by not considering the self-choice of individuals, Bourdieu limits their ability to choose, act and strategize. They actually become passive receivers of practices in the fields, without sufficient examination of how these practices are being determined (Certeau, 1984). However, Bourdieu (1990) clarified this by arguing that individuals are reasonable beings who are capable of applying sound, practical (or common) sense which allows them to act based on the existing circumstances or developed structures in the field (Bourdieu, 1990).

Furthermore, Bourdieu's conceptual tools are believed to be confusing when not linked to its foundations (Lau, 2004; Laberge, 2010). This is not surprising as the concepts were developed to suit a particular context that allowed their construction. For example, Hurst (2013: 48) argues that concepts such as habitus are more fruitful when read against the backdrop of Bourdieu's attempt to understand how classes differentially occupy social space.

Yet, Bourdieu clearly pointed out that:

“the core of my work lies in the method and the way of thinking. To be more precise, my method is a manner of asking questions, rather than ideas” (cited in Mahar, 1990: 220).

On the other hand, Reay (2004) argues that:

“a great deal of educational research references habitus instead of working with the concept as Bourdieu advocates” (440).

The quotes from Mahar (1990) and Reay (2004) above confirm that Bourdieu's theoretical concepts are suitable as reflecting tools to guide the conduct of research.

I concur with the argument posed by many authors that Bourdieu's concepts should be treated as thinking tools to allow their applicability in a new context and also to guide research in education (Grenfell and James, 1998; Reay, 2004; Makoe, 2006; Mutch, 2006; Grenfell, 2007; Rawolle and Lingard, 2008; Nolan, 2011). The present study uses the concepts as reflective tools to conduct, guide, understand, describe and discuss rural students' experiences and their trajectories in the social world in which they live and study.

3.6 Research Questions

The literature review and theoretical framework helped me to develop the following main research question and sub-questions. The research sub-questions were used as a guide to find answers to the overarching research question.

Overarching Research Question

How do rural distance education students perceive, describe and discuss their teaching and learning experiences at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT)?

Research Sub-Questions

- a) How do undergraduate students at the OUT describe the teaching, learning and interaction processes in their particular field?
- b) How does the habitus of students influence their learning in the academic field?
- c) How do students discuss the challenges they face in learning when mediating between fields, and what strategies do students employ in order to succeed and sustain their learning within these fields?
- d) Do the available support services in their fields meet the learning needs of students? If not, how do rural students wish to be supported in their learning?

- e) Which support opportunities and recommendations are in place so that the learning experiences of rural students at the Open University of Tanzania can be improved?

3.7 Summary of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter was to set the scene for the data collection and analysis to follow. Examples of various support practices were drawn from both developing and developed countries to see how support issues are considered at other universities, and to identify differences in practice between institutions. A key emerging issue was the inadequate use of modern technology to facilitate teaching and support practices in developing countries. This has made universities in the developing world to continue to focus more on traditional ways of teaching.

This chapter also conceptualised the meaning and relevancy of distance education in the rural developing countries and discussed the broader role of ‘the university’ globally. The purpose of discussing the broader societal roles of universities in the world was to observe the OUT through a comparative lens and discover gaps and problems with the university’s conception of itself and its mission.

Studies of students’ experiences relating to gender, teaching and learning were also part of the discussion in this chapter, by which I was able to identify the gaps in existing knowledge to be addressed by this study. Finally, the chapter concluded with a presentation of the theoretical framework of this study and of the proposed research questions.

Life worlds 3: Simon – Regional Centre C

Introduction

Simon is a seventh-year male student in the 50-59 age group. He was studying for a Bachelor of Science degree with Education. My 12-hour journey to Simon's home started from Dar es Salaam, which is about 842 kilometres from region C. I used a bus to travel from Dar es Salaam to Region C. I contacted Simon by phone on the next day informing him of my arrival in the region and we scheduled our meeting.

On the day I went to visit Simon at his office in one of the district towns in region C, I woke up early from my hotel to catch the first bus which left at 6 am. The journey over a rough road took more than five and a half hours. However, before going to his office, I spent two hours in the town and discovered that the district did not have a national district library, nor did it have an OUT study centre. However, the area did have electricity and there were a few historic buildings. I also managed to find an Internet café with low bandwidth - it took me a long time to attach one of my documents to an email. These findings acted as a basis for our initial conversation about teaching and learning.

Simon's Office

My conversation took place in Simon's office, which was a few kilometres from the district town, and which he shared with three other people. Simon was one of the secondary school inspectors at the District Education Office.

Initially, we discussed his work experiences before I realised that his colleagues had vacated the office, thus providing me with an opportunity to engage Simon in conversation without the others being present. I gave Simon a consent form to read and sign. He read and ticked all the items listed in the form except that of recording the interview session. I discovered this when I also signed the form. I had to reorient myself as I planned to use the tape recorder in our session. I ended up taking a pen and my diary to document our conversation. Our conversation had a friendly atmosphere as Simon was cooperative and very open. He freely expressed his

feelings, perceptions and insights regarding the teaching and learning practices at the OUT.

Simon's Family and Educational Background

Simon told me he grew up in a rural society where it was obligatory for all the children in the community to go to school. He said that when he was a child he used to follow his brothers to school and this helped him to develop a personal ethos of wanting to study. He passed through the conventional system of primary and secondary school, and then on to diploma level. Being used to full-time learning programmes, he gained two diplomas, one in education and the other in animal science. Indeed, his decision to study for a Bachelor of Science in education was influenced by his own educational background, as he intimated that the subjects he was taking at the university were similar to the ones he had studied in previous educational courses.

In our conversation, Simon commented that his educational pursuits at the previous levels were influenced by his parents, relatives and neighbours who encouraged and motivated him to study hard. He did not need direct financial support at that time as education was free, unlike the current system where parents have to contribute to almost all levels of education. He also said that he had studied in mission schools where the children were brought up in a religious manner. When comparing his early education to the current culture of his people, he believed that people today had no motivation to educate their children, as children were seen only as cattle keepers and as a source of labour.

His Current Family

Simon married for a second time after the death of his first wife. He is a family man with six children, four with his late wife, and two very young children with his second wife. At the time we spoke, he was struggling with college fees as he had to pay for his own studies in addition to the education of his four older children.

Because of his family and work obligations, he did not have enough time to study, and he also complained about the noise and disturbances made by his children. At

home, Simon is involved with small farming and gardening activities, while community service activities also interfere with his timetable for studying. For example, he said he was involved in community guarding ('sungusungu') during the evening hours. This was a mandatory undertaking in his area and they each had a special schedule for the task.

Simon's Experience in his Current Education

As a seventh-year student, Simon seemed to be tired, desperate and stressed out because of his studies. He constantly challenged the system of teaching and learning at the OUT, comparing it negatively to the full-time programmes he had experienced previously in the conventional system of education, and saying that students in the conventional system received far better support. For example, he stated that the latter group had sufficient teachers in place, had access to sufficient learning materials and often studied together as a group. These conditions were contrary to his current experience at the OUT where one had to study alone and face challenges in isolation.

Simon argued that although the OUT provided print study materials, arranged face-to-face sessions and prepared practical sessions for science students, they were still remiss in not providing tutors at the regional centre. He also pointed out that the conduct of the face-to-face sessions was a joke as during the sessions there were no specialist tutors present. He cited Zoology as an example of a subject which had no tutors at his regional centre.

The costs incurred during attendance at practical sessions were also a sore point with Simon. As students have to be away from home for almost a month, he pointed out that he had to pay for his accommodation, food and transport during that period. This was too much for him to bear considering he was required to take care of his family too.

He said that the lack of access to teachers was a big hindrance to science students. There was a need for practical assistance and clarification of technical terms. He repeatedly raised the issue regarding the lack of Internet access at the regional centre, and the time spent in Internet cafes waiting for the server to upload information.

Because of this, he decided to buy his own laptop and modem, and can now access online resources related to his science course. Now in the seventh year of his studies, Simon believes that the lack of support and the inadequate access to resources means that it is unlikely that he will complete his studies successfully.

Advice for Improvement

Simon ended up by suggesting that the OUT should reconsider their system of support otherwise there would be no future students from the rural areas. His decision to enrol at the OUT was influenced by the lack of access he had to the conventional system which he now believes to be no longer the case. I ended my conversation with Simon by asking him what he considered to be the most important areas that would support his studies. He replied as follows: teacher support, learning materials, and immediate feedback on tests and examination results.

I met Simon again in June when I went to his region to collect field diaries from my participants. By then, Simon was busy preparing himself for his final year examinations. We talked about his interview transcript and discussed how he was progressing. He was optimistic and thought he would probably finish his studies in the next academic year. We departed happily with the promise of meeting up again in the near future.

4 Chapter Four: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three I justified the reasons for conducting this study. I did so by identifying the knowledge gap in the existing research literature. I also developed the theoretical framework which guides the research practices in the study. In this chapter, I will provide information on the methodological perspective adopted in this study, the fieldwork for which was conducted over a period of eight months in rural Tanzania. The study covered four sampled regional centres of the OUT, namely Rukwa, Ruvuma, Mtwara and Tabora. These places were conceptualised as academic fields in which rural students accessed various forms of teaching and support services to facilitate their studies at a distance.

This chapter is divided into nine sections. The first section presents an introduction to the study while the second one discusses my readiness to carry out this research. The third section presents the research design, strategy and philosophical foundation. A description of the research context is provided in section four while sections five, six and seven include discussion on accessibility to field sites and research phases, participants and their selection procedures, and data generation methods. Section eight gives information on the research vigour and validity of the study, while the final section provides a summary presented in diagrammatic form.

4.2 Readiness of the Researcher

This section provides a brief overview of my readiness to embark on this study. The journey toward my PhD study started in October, 2009, when I first arrived at Edinburgh University to pursue this long, interesting and at times frustrating but ultimately rewarding process. Upon my arrival I received guidance from my supervisors on how to develop my research skills and write my research proposals. One of the most important pieces of advice was to attend the postgraduate research courses which were offered within the university.

I took the advice they gave and opted for a number of research courses offered by the Moray House School of Education and the School of Political Science.

I subsequently attended courses on research design, qualitative research, educational inquiry, qualitative data analysis and the nature of enquiry. These courses broadened my research knowledge, philosophy and skills and thus guided my research methodology.

Moreover, the scholarly critical advice provided by my supervisors during proposal writing, added to the feedback obtained from my first year university progression board, enabled me, as a researcher, to develop and shape my research study. I also gained the confidence to carry out this study by attending PhD seminar sessions at the Moray House School of Education and at the University. I also attended skills courses on thesis development, on writing a literature review and in critical thinking. All of the skills I gained helped to expand my scope of thinking, arguing and writing.

I participated in the Education Media 2012 conference in Colorado, Denver, where I presented a paper on ICT-based support for rural distance students in Tanzania. I also presented my study in a conference entitled 'Higher Education as if the World Mattered' organised by the Institute for Education, Community and Society at Edinburgh University. My participation in these activities provided me with an opportunity to receive constructive feedback on the content and methodology and so helped to shape my study.

4.3 Research Design, Strategy and Philosophical Foundation

This section describes the research approach I adopted, the philosophical belief underpinning the study, and the research strategy which guided the data collection processes and analysis. This study is qualitative, informed by constructivism and uses ethnography as a research strategy.

4.3.1 Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research design has long been used to guide the conduct of studies in the educational context (Cohen et al, 2011). Although I am familiar with other designs such as mixed and quantitative research designs, I decided that this particular topic of investigation required a qualitative approach (Cresswell, 2003, 2009; Cohen et al, 2011; Bryman, 2012). The use of a qualitative research design in my study

influenced my own active participation in the data generation process. For example, I spent a significant amount of time familiarizing myself with participants and field sites. This allowed me to use multiple research methods which generated a very large amount of data.

The ability to access natural data from the field allowed the smooth generation of data at students' homes, in their working place and at the regional centres. I actively observed and participated in events and activities carried out within and outside the regional centres. I was also engaged in discussions with my research participants who informed me of their experiences in teaching and learning at the OUT, and about the challenges they faced and the coping strategies they used.

My ability to observe and participate in person in these data generation processes would not have been possible if I had used a quantitative research design as it excludes researchers from actively exploring, collecting and participating in data collection processes in the natural context due to the fear of influencing or contaminating the data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Similarly, I rejected the use of mixed method design. While useful for some studies I did not feel that my research questions would be appropriately answered through the use of a quantitative component.

However, qualitative research does have its critics. In fact, it is argued to be subjective, not valid and limited in terms of the generalizability of its findings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Cho and Trent, 2006; Niaz, 2009). By contrast, quantitative research design is said by some researchers to be objective and generalizable because it uses large samples, and is less contaminated in the field and in the data analysis by possible bias from researchers (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Cresswell, 2007, 2009). However, this study's goal was not the generalization of data, but the applicability and transferability of findings to other developing countries with similar characteristics to rural Tanzania.

I would add that no single research design is free from bias. What matters most in selecting a research design is its suitability to the area under investigation. Of course, the problem of bias in qualitative research can be reduced by employing the principle

of triangulation (Silverman, 2005; Cresswell, 2009). For example, I triangulated the research methods and findings from participants to ensure their validity. Further explanation of how I maintained validity and rigour of my study is documented in section 4.8.3 below.

4.3.2 Epistemological Perspective

The study is informed by constructivist epistemology. Principally, constructivists do not believe in the existence of objective truth in the social world (Crotty, 1998). They mainly believe in the ‘social construction of reality’ (LeCompte and Schaum, 1999: 48). This means that they believe in the creation of deep meaning through the collaborative efforts of the researcher and participants, and not through discoveries of ‘truth’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). I considered this to be a crucial element of my study. Positivists, by contrast, require researchers to detach themselves from the social world to allow discoveries by not contaminating information gathered from the field (Crotty, 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This is contrary to the needs of the constructivist who believes in a negotiated meaning that only occurs when the researcher is fully involved in the process of data generation (Lecompte and Schaum, 1999: 50).

This study required the exploration and understanding of rural students’ experiences and their trajectories. I had to actively engage in the data generation process, be involved in observations and listen to students’ stories, to construct and interpret their experiences, and to attach meaning to their feelings, perceptions, behaviours and actions. This is to say that I reflected on students’ habitus and their exposure and reaction to the rural, domestic and academic fields of the OUT from within a constructivist epistemological tradition.

4.3.3 Research Strategy and its Justification

The need to obtain rich, contextual data in this study led to the selection of an ethnographic research strategy. Ethnographic methods have been widely employed in understanding teaching and learning processes over recent decades (Walford, 2008; Flick, 2009).

Traditionally, ethnography is deeply rooted in anthropology and traditionally anthropologists used ethnography to study an alien or foreign place dissimilar to their own culture, which involved immersing themselves in the field for a long period of time. However, this is different from modern versions of ethnography which are conducted in diversified urban and rural organizations and communities (Wolcott, 2002; Genzuck, 2003; Walford, 2008; Flick, 2009).

Ethnography

There is no clear, standard form of defining the term ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Most authors relate the term to fieldwork, to the study of the culture of a group of people and to accounts of social life in a natural setting (Fetterman, 1998, 2010; LeCompte and Schensul, 1999; Pole and Morrison, 2003).

However, there is a common consensus that ethnography is best described in relation to the following features: Ethnography examines people's accounts and actions; it focuses on a group of people and discrete locations, settings and events; it carries out participant observation; it relies on rigorous and thorough research; it provides accurate reflections of participants' perspectives and behaviours; it involves close, face-to-face interaction with research participants; it includes multiple data collection processes which are mostly unstructured; it requires the researcher to be an instrument; it is descriptive; it allows the researcher to observe and experience events, behaviours, interactions and conversations in the field; it requires researchers to spend a long time in the field (from six months to two years); and it uses inductive, interactive and recursive data collection and analytic strategies (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999: 9; Pole and Morrison, 2003: 3; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3; Murchison, 2010: 12-13). By considering the above features and reflecting on them, the researcher is thus equipped to carry out an ethnographic study.

Why use ethnography in this study?

There are many alternative research methodologies that could guide a study such as this one, for example case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative inquiry and critical qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2003, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Given the

need of this current study to explore and richly describe students' experiences, events and sites, however, it seemed clear that an ethnographic strategy was the most appropriate. Moreover, the use of ethnography in my study is also a contribution in the field of distance education since most existing studies focus on case study, survey strategies and comparative approaches (Minnis, 1985; Saba, 2005).

Furthermore, my exposure to Bourdieu's conceptual tools of habitus and field, which formed a theoretical base for this study, had already made me familiar with the ethnographic methods used by Bourdieu himself (Bourdieu, 1990; Grenfell and James, 1998; Grenfell, 2007). A good example of his ethnographic work can be drawn from a study of the Kabyle peasants of northern Algeria (Swartz, 1997; Goodman and Silverstein, 2009). In this study, Bourdieu observed experiences related to pre-colonial Algerian society, and even took part in revolutionary activities during the war there.

Bourdieu used observations, statistical analysis, questionnaire and in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of a social field, and seemed to be a pioneer of mixed research designs. However, here I differ from Bourdieu on the grounds that mixed research design has an epistemological and theoretical orientation which affects data management and analysis (Crotty, 1998).

The use of purely qualitative ethnographic approaches such as immersion in local settings, spending a long time in the field, attempting to reach an understanding of local culture by being embedded within it, and observing first hand events, sites and activities, (Hammersley, 1990; Lecompte and Schensul, 1999; Genzuk, 2003; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Fetterman, 2010) enriched my understanding of students' habitus and their participation in various practices in the rural, domestic and academic fields of the OUT.

4.4 Research Context

4.4.1 Research Context

The processes of proposal development and thesis writing were carried out at the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom. However, the data generation took

place in Tanzania. The conduct of the study in Tanzania was mainly influenced by the inadequate information currently available on rural students' experiences in distance education universities in developing countries.

The OUT is the only mandated distance education university in Tanzania. This study selected Mtwara, Rukwa, Tabora and Ruvuma to represent those centres that were the most distantly located from the OUT headquarters in Dar es Salaam. The regions selected experience a number of serious socio-economic challenges and have a poor rural infrastructure. Issues of poverty, low economic status, inadequate medical care and low access to educational opportunities are among the difficulties faced on a regular basis by Tanzanians living in rural communities (Ellis and Mdoe, 2003; URT, 2005, 2011a, 2011c; Aikaeli, 2010). The table below shows the locations of the sampled field sites and their distance from the headquarters:

Regional Centres (Field Sites)	Distance from Dar es Salaam (Kilometres)	Driving hours (Bus)
Mtwara	556 km	8-10 hours
Tabora	1026 km	13 Hours
Ruvuma	947 km	14 hours
Rukwa	1389 km (Via Mbeya)	18 hours

Source: Field data

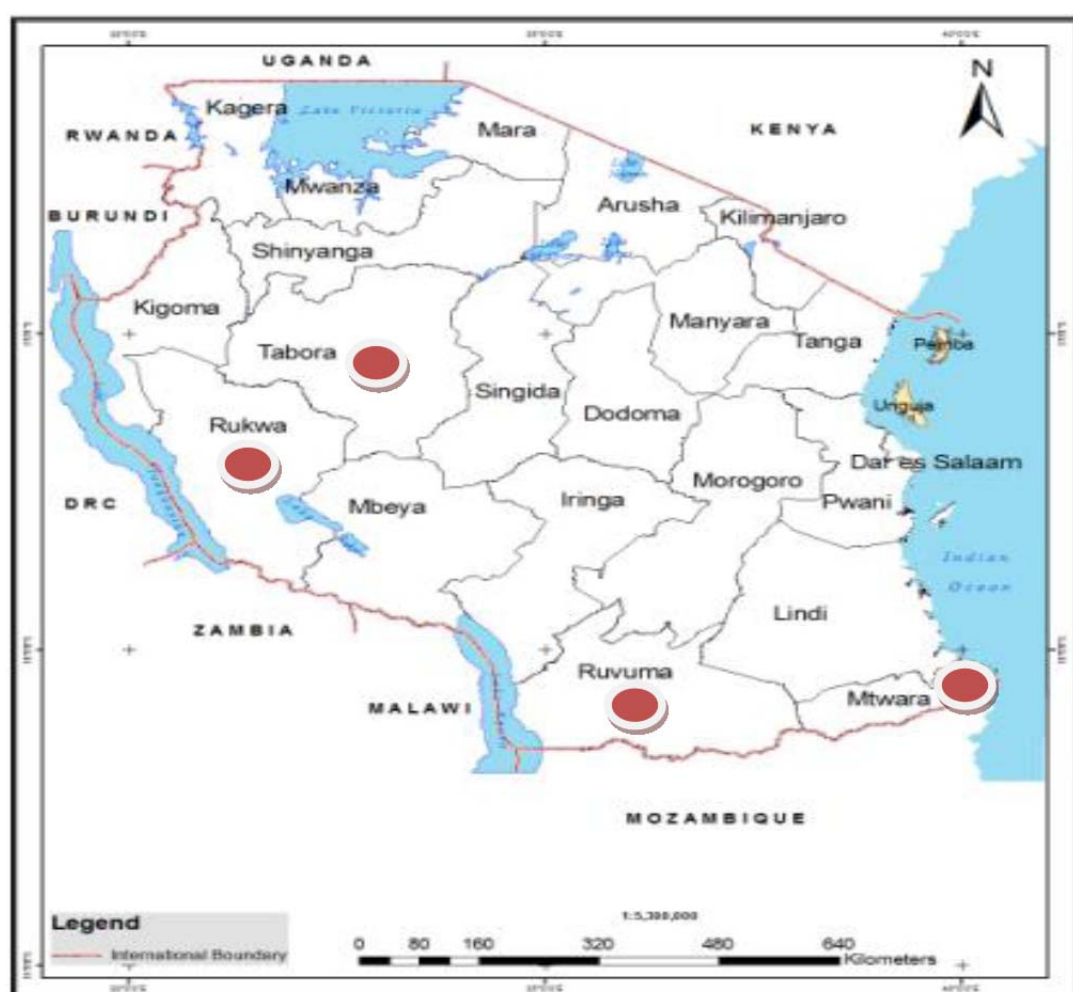
Table 4: Location of Field sites and distance from the OUT Headquarters in Dar es Salaam

4.4.2 The Selection of Research Sites

The selection of the four research sites was influenced, among other things, by the research design and an ethnographic requirement to study only a few sites in order to generate data that was both in-depth and manageable (Murchson, 2010). This limited the expansion of the study into other regional centres but also ensured that the data generated was not shallow. In addition, the issues of costs, time and the constant movement between one field site and another justified the belief that the selection of four regional centres would be adequate for this study.

Statistics show that the four regional centres selected lag behind other centres in terms of enrolment and numbers of graduations (OUT, 2010a). For example, a review of documents noted that about 30% of enrolled students and less than 24% of all OUT graduates originally came from less developed, rural regions, while the remainder came from larger cities such as Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Iringa, Mbeya, Arusha, Dodoma, Tanga, Kilimanjaro and Morogoro (OUT, 2010a). These figures are probably accounted for by the fact that students in the cities have more access to human, economic and infrastructural resources than those students living in the more remote rural areas.

The following map shows the locations of the sampled regions.



Source: Tanzania in Figures 2010 (URT, 2011: i)

Figure 4: Map of Tanzania showing the selected regional centres

4.5 Accessing Field Sites and Research Phases

Accessing Field Sites

My journey to generate ethnographic data started at the University of Edinburgh where I received a research clearance permit from the postgraduate office. I also had to be careful to observe Tanzanian research protocols. This was done by submitting my PhD proposal, and the research clearance permit from Edinburgh, to the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), who is my employer and the mandated organization that provided the research permit which allowed me to conduct my study in Tanzania. This process took about two weeks, after which I was officially permitted to conduct my study in Tanzania (see appendix 2).

I then took the research permit from the UDSM and attached it with a letter of request to visit the field sites at the OUT.

I experienced a number of challenges when negotiating access to the OUT as an 'outsider' from Edinburgh University. The negotiations were between the researcher (me), and the administrative officials of the OUT who control access to all the relevant sites and data. Throughout this process, questions relating to issues regarding access to the selected field sites were raised and required justification. Because of this, I thought I might not be granted access to the selected field sites. However, this may just have been an example of the strict ethical and data protection procedures that the OUT is required to carry out. After a delay of two weeks I was granted permission to enter the field sites.

The research clearance obtained from the OUT completely changed my outlook as the student participants and gatekeepers (regional directors) soon made me feel like an insider at the field sites. They were warm, transparent, interactive and helpful. I chose the regional directors as key contacts because of their experience in teaching, learning, administrative issues and their familiarization with the regional demarcations.

Gaining access to field sites also included interaction and building rapport with my student participants (Scott, 1998; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Murchison,

2010). I purposefully selected the students involved, having obtained their mobile phone numbers from the register book. I made a point of visiting students in their localities by letting participants choose a suitable place for our meeting. A few opted to meet me in their offices, while most offered me a warm welcome to their homes, this being the culture of many Tanzanians.

Accessing students in their rural locations was not easy as they were scattered and some lived in very remote places. I sometimes had to travel in open-roofed Land Rovers, by bicycle and on motor cycles when visiting them. In addition, the slippery nature of the rural roads during the rainy season meant that cars and buses could only go so far and so I had to walk the rest of the way. However, there were compensations in the beautiful scenery of the mountains, forests and farms. These, allied to the students' generous natures, sustained me in my research activities.



Figure 5: Nice scenery at one of the rural sites

I had no problems when requesting students to sign the consent forms that indicated their agreement to take part in the study. They were happy to take part and even asked me about my experiences as a student in the UK. Telling them about my own

experiences helped to build a bond of trust between us and, in return, my participants responded with great candour in our conversations.

In fact, my visits to the rural areas made me appreciate the warmth of the culture in these areas, particularly when welcoming visitors into their homes. As well as sharing meals together, we had conversations on many of the social, cultural and economic issues concerning rural Tanzania. Several of the students I met in the rural areas were living with their extended families, which was a reminder to me of the extent of the extra social and economic responsibilities that many rural students have to carry.

In gaining access to the rural areas and to my participants, I had to adapt to a certain manner of dress. I had to dress in a 'respectful way' as my casual wearing of jeans and t-shirt in Edinburgh would not have been suitable in that culture and location. Therefore, I had to wear a long dress or skirt, and sometimes a lapper (Kitenge) and turban (kilemba) when walking around the rural areas.

Moreover, as most of the student participants were older than me, I had to pay them due respect because of their age. Therefore, words and phrases such as 'sorry', 'thank you', 'habari za leo' (how are you?), 'shikamoo' (a greeting for elders), 'can I come?' and 'would you mind if I call you again?' were all regularly used in my study. At times, I had to remind myself of my role as an ethnographer, and that I was not a new member of the village community.

While I was there I observed traditional dances, weddings and initiation and circumcision ceremonies which maintain the traditional values of the people in rural Tanzania. My participation in cultural events, in the sharing of food, and in conversations in students' homes created a relaxed atmosphere and removed the barriers that would normally be accorded to an outsider with an urban habitus.

Phases of the Study

The plan for this study was divided into three main phases. Phase one was to be the pilot study, phase two involved the actual field work and phase three the finalizing and verification processes.

4.6 Participants and their Selection Procedures

The success of this study is as a result of the contributions provided by tutors, students and OUT administrators. The study selected students (24), tutors (7), regional directors (4) and top OUT officials (5), and used purposeful and snowballing sampling procedures. The procedures selected are commonly used in conducting qualitative educational research (Cohen et al, 2007, 2011). Table 5 below presents participants' characteristics, and distribution and sampling procedures:

Participants	Number	Location	Sampling Procedure
Students	24	Rural	Purposeful
Tutors	7	Regional centres	Purposeful/Convenience
Regional directors	4	Regional centres	Purposeful
OUT top officials	5	OUT Headquarters	Purposeful/Snowballing
Total	40		

Table 5: Participants' characteristics, distribution and sampling procedures

Recruitment of the Students

Students were identified from the register books available at the regional centres. These books indicate the name, year of study, address and mobile phone number of the student. I selected participants based on the number of years of study a student had completed and how far the student was located from an urban area. I wanted to base my study on students in their second year or later, who would have had a reasonable level of teaching and learning experience at the OUT. I also considered as participants those students who were able to participate in this study over a fairly long period.

In total I selected ten students per regional centre. After contacting all of these I chose six students from each regional centre as main participants (24 in total) and four from each as reserves. The voluntary nature of students' participation in my

study and their freedom to drop out at any time made it wise to have other participants available in case of withdrawal.

The selected students comprised eighteen male and six female students. Table 6 below shows students' gender alongside the number of years they had studied.

Year of Study	No of students		Total
	Male	Female	
Second Year	2	1	3
Third Year	2	3	5
Fourth Year	7	-	7
Fifth Year	4	1	5
Sixth Year	2	1	3
Seventh Year	1	-	1
Total	18	6	24

Table 6: Students' gender and their years of study

Students participating in the study had a number of different entry qualifications. For example, sixteen students had a diploma qualification, seven had the advanced secondary certificate, and one had a foundation course certificate from the OUT. There were also differences in the degree programmes they were studying, as indicated in Figure 6 below.

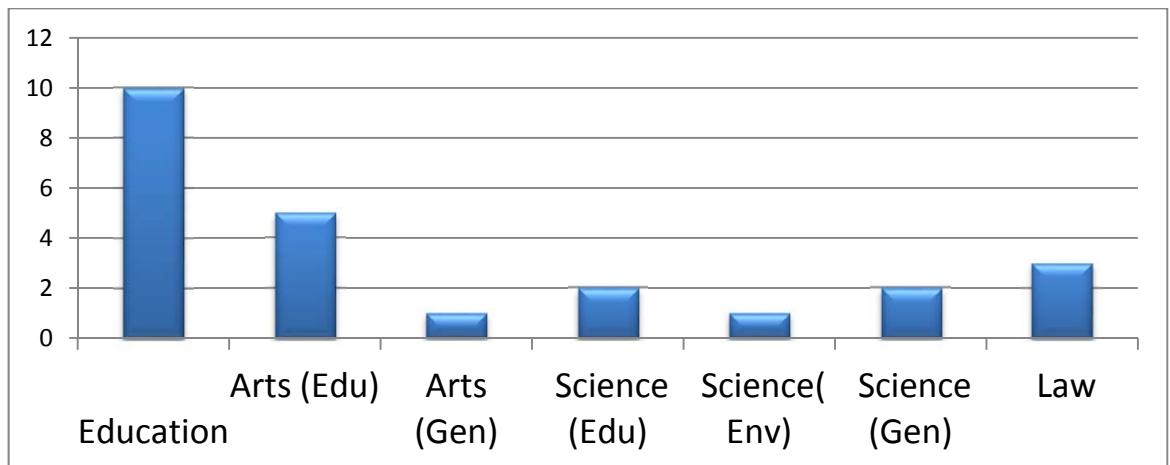


Figure 6: Student distribution by Bachelor Degree programme

The students selected in this study were employed in public and private organizations. They were teachers in primary and secondary schools (the majority), district education officers, education inspectors, magistrates, a health officer, an optician, a community worker, and a technical building engineer. Students were also involved in a number of other economic activities that included: petty trading, tailoring, agriculture, farming, masonry, carpentry and animal husbandry.

Tutors, Regional Directors and top OUT Officials

Tutors, regional directors and the identified top officials were selected based on the nature of their positions. I used purposeful and snowballing sample techniques to include them in my study. After identification, I personally contacted them in their respective offices and invited them to take part in the study.

4.7 Data Generation Methods and Pilot Study

4.7.1 Pilot study

The pilot study was conducted in regional centre A and preceded the actual field work activities in the rural areas. During the pilot study I tried out my data generation methods in the rural villages near regional centre A. I also used my digital camera and tape recorder, just to be sure that the quality of voice and images I had taken were of a clear enough standard. I contacted five of the student participants and conducted interviews with them. This activity helped me as a novice researcher in

improving my ability to manage time in the main study, and to learn how to engage participants in conversation and ask probing questions of them.

I also conducted informal conversations with students who came to the regional centre to access copies of printed study materials and to speak to their tutors. I discovered that students were using the space available in the regional centres to study, while some were using books from the mini-libraries and national regional libraries. This prompted me to consider these places as areas for my observation during the conduct of my main study.

I also familiarized myself with the rural locations, the available modes of transport and the area's culture. During the pilot study, I realized that the use of English during the purposeful conversations (interviews) did not provide participants with the freedom of expression they required to really say what they believed. Because of this, I received very little relevant information.

After reflecting on this I decided to allow the participants to use either English or Swahili (my national language) for the purpose of our discussion. The results were superb as I managed to obtain more in-depth information than I expected. It is understood that ethnographers do not go to the fields with a pre-determined set of interview questions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Fetterman, 2010). I therefore, developed a set of research topics which guided the conduct of my main study (see table 7 below).

Topics	Sub-topics
Students' Characteristics (Introduction)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction- Age, marital status, gender, entry qualification, location, year of study, occupation, degree programme. • Reasons for studying at the OUT • Motives for Pursuing a degree programme
Students' Habitus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area of origin, educational and family background • Influence of educational and family background in their current education
Teaching and learning experiences in the fields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mode of teaching and students learning processes in the fields, learning environment, mode of communication and interaction patterns
Challenges and Adopted survival Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges experienced in learning in the rural, domestic and academic fields • Adopted coping strategies
Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of support, available support services in each of the fields, students' perceptions of the available support, students' desired needs for support, and available opportunities for support in rural, domestic and academic fields
Suggestions for improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested areas for improving teaching and learning practices in the rural areas

Table 7: Interview topic areas for students

Findings and Changes

The conduct of the pilot study benefited my main study in the following ways:

1. I realized that the selection of students' participants based on gender and degree programmes would not be possible as there existed no data to support the variables from the students' register books in the regional centres.
2. I discovered the differences in terms of experience between the second year students and those who had been studying for longer. The differences centred

on students' experience of ICT, since information on examination results and registration courses could now be obtained online from the OUT. Because of the new system, complaints about access to information and results then differed between the second-year students and the others. I then had to reconsider my initial plan of selecting third year students and above.

3. I had to expand the scope of my study to include two other regional centres. From my informal conversations with tutors and the Regional Director of regional centre A, it was clear that some were unsure about taking part in the study because of anonymity and confidentiality concerns. I realised that I may not manage to recruit sufficient numbers of participants from two sites and, as the OUT has at least 27 regional centres to choose from, it was possible to broaden the scope of my research.
4. I considered Swahili as an additional language of communication with participants. The purpose was to allow for full freedom of speech among those participants who were not comfortable with the use of English.

4.7.2 Data Generation Methods

I used interviews, observation and documents such as photographs, participant diaries (journals), and official documents as sources of data in my study. The subsections below describe the application of each method.

Interview Method and its Application

The interview topics were based on my research questions, objectives and observations in the fields. Interview sessions were carried out in locations selected by participants and consent forms were filled in prior the start of the session. Interviews with students were conducted in their homes and offices and took about 60-90 minutes. Appointments were also secured to conduct interviews with tutors, regional directors and the OUT's top officials. All of these interviews took place in their offices at a time convenient to them, and usually lasted between 45-60 minutes. I used a tape recorder to document the conversations with participants.

Only one participant refused to tick the box in the consent form that indicated our conversation would be recorded, so I had to use pen and pencil to document his information. The use of the tape recorder was useful to me as it facilitated the transcription process.

I asked open-ended questions in an unstructured way, for example:

- Would you mind telling me about your childhood educational/family background?
- How do you view support at the OUT?
- Can you tell me about other forms of support you get from your home, employers and friends?
- What problems do you encounter in your studies at the OUT?
- How do you manage your studies in this rural environment?
- Would you mind describing your needs as a rural student?

Questions similar to the following were directed to regional directors and the OUT's top officials:

- How does the OUT support students within their localities?
- How does the OUT facilitate the learning of students?
- What challenges does the University experience in relation to teaching and teaching practices?
- What strategies are in place to facilitate learning among rural students, given the fact that all the regional centres are urban-based?
- What are your recommendations for improving the current inadequacies in teaching and in supporting rural students in their studies?

And finally, tutors were asked questions like:

- Can you discuss your experiences regarding supporting students in their studies?
- Can you discuss any challenges you sometimes encounter in the course of supporting students to learn?
- Do you have any special strategies to facilitate the learning of students in the rural areas?

I also occasionally asked a number of probing follow-up questions to prompt more talk from participants. However, I was conscious not to dominate the sessions and gave participants as much freedom as they wished to discuss the issues at length, without interference.

Interview sessions were carried out in three phases. I started with individual students in the rural areas. I then transcribed a few of the interviews and raised some issues that required clarification from tutors and other administrators. The interviews in the second phase were with tutors and regional directors within the regional centres, while the third phase were interviews with the OUT's top officials in Dar es Salaam who dealt with managerial functions.

Observation

Observation is one of the central activities performed by ethnographers in any field site (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In performing observational activities in the field I played an intermediate role between complete observer and complete participant. This meant that I could assume the role of being both an insider and outsider in the fields. This was influenced by the fact that my student participants were not always in the same physical place. Sometimes they were scattered throughout the rural areas while at other times they gathered together in the regional centres for special events and activities such as examinations or for face-to-face and practical sessions.

Therefore, there were occasions when I identified myself as an outsider, especially when I was involved in observation at students' homes, and in learning centres such as libraries, or when checking on the available teaching and learning resources in the regions. I played the role of insider when I engaged with participants in discussions and when I took part in the events and activities that were conducted in the regions. In those situations I took note of participants' views, accounts and analyses.

My positioning as an insider and outsider was influenced by the belief that:

“a good ethnographer will take any opportunity to listen and to ask questions of individuals and groups whilst participating and observing” (O'Reilly, 2005: 114).

Such a role helped me to manage and document events, participate in scheduled activities in the regional centres and generate data through formal and informal conversations.

For example, I participated in some of the face-to-face teaching sessions at regional centre B. I have provided a detailed discussion on my participation there in section 5.4.1 of Chapter Five. In one situation, I participated as one of the undergraduate students in attendance at a face-to-face session. I followed all the instructions given to me by the tutors in the sessions and then discussed the session afterwards with students. This allowed me to gain insight into the academic challenges that students face, particularly in relation to their printed study materials and the possible solutions to problems.

I also conducted observations at students' homes. In this instance, I observed, and then shared my impression of what I had observed with my participants. For example, I asked students about the space they had in their homes that could be used to study in, how much time they had to study and the nature of the challenges they faced. The focus of my observation is given below:

Place	Things to Observe	Description- Findings
Regional Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability/Accessibility to Library services and other learning resources • Tutor support • Internet Services • Study space • Nature of communication • Scheduled teaching and learning activities • Media for teaching • Accessibility to tutor and peer interaction 	
Urban/town area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility to library services and other learning resources • Availability and accessibility to Internet services • Other available opportunities for support (tutors, colleges, universities) 	
Home Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning materials (Print study materials and reference books) • Learning space and conduciveness • Access to Internet, laptop and computer services • Electricity 	
Rural Community/Students' Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural, social and economic activities • Distance to town/regional centres (mode of transport, time spent and challenges experienced) • Access to peer and graduate/tutor support • Living environment • Availability of study centres and their condition • Available opportunities for supporting students' learning 	

Table 8: Observational activities in Regional Centres, regional towns and students' localities

Documents

I used document review as another source of data. The documents I drew on included my own personal field note diary, participant-created documents such as diaries and photographs, and policy documentations such as government reports and OUT documents.

Field notes

My role as an ethnographic researcher in this study required that I carry out one of the core duties of ethnographers, namely that of writing field notes (Lareau and Shultz, 1996; O'Reilly, 2005; Murchison, 2010). Doing this meant that I had to have a research diary (a journal) in which I regularly and systematically recorded students' stories, as well as notes on my journeys to the field sites and on students' participation in various events and activities. My research journal also documented the information I had heard in having non-purposeful conversations with rural students at the regional centres.

In the process of taking field notes, I also drew sketches of the routes to students' homes, their home settings and of the physical structure of the regional centres, in addition to the various learning resources such as libraries, computer rooms and study materials rooms. I attached notes to every sketch drawn. The sketches acted as a background to the descriptions of other field notes and established a sense of place (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). In fact, the focus of my consideration was on items that were significant to the needs of my study. This meant that I had to consider the where, when, who, how and why of every incident, event and activity I recorded (Emerson et al, 1995; O'Reilly, 2009). Thus, access to my field notes gave me fresh experiences from the field as I recalled the information during the data analysis processes.

OUT and Government Documents

I used various documents accessed from the OUT and from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Tanzania, detailed below. These documents were used to create an understanding of the functions of the OUT, the history of

distance education in Tanzania, the Tanzanian educational and funding systems and the role of regional centres. Information from the government and the OUT has been mainly used for background and discussion purposes. Table 9 below shows the reviewed documents.

Source	Nature of Document
OUT policy documents and research report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on Establishment of OUT (1990) • Students' Register Book • OUT Facts and Figures (2010a, 2011a, 2012a, 2013) • OUT Prospectus (2010b, 2011c, 2012b) • Policy and Operational Procedures on study materials (2009c) • Students' Affairs Policy and Operational Procedures (2009d) • ICT policy (2010c) • Quality Assurance and Control Policy (2008) • OUT Rolling Strategic Plan 2010-2015 (2011b) • A Report on Activities of the OUT 2008/2009
Government policies and reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Higher Education Policy (1999) • Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania (BEST) (2011, 2012) • Tanzania Educational Policy (1995) • Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) (2008, 2010) • Secondary Education Development Programme II (2010-2015) • Tanzania Five Year Development Plan (2011/2012-2015/2016) • National Information and Communications Technologies Policy (2003)

Table 9: List of documents accessed from the OUT and government ministry

Diaries (Journals)

In this study I used diaries kept by my participants as a primary source of data. This was because I wanted to capture the essence of students' day-to-day engagement with their studies and with their other social, cultural and economic activities.

I asked a total of twelve students to volunteer to fill in the diaries based on their daily encounters and activities. Once their consent was given, I advised them on how to fill in the diaries so that their entries had a similar format. Participants agreed to keep the diary for six months (January to June, 2011).

My orientation sessions with students involved sharing my personal diary which I had kept for a one-year period during my first year study at the University of Edinburgh. In this diary, I had documented my personal experiences as they occurred on a daily basis. My entries expressed the feelings of happiness, joy, sorrow, frustration and disappointment that I had experienced throughout that first year. Students were free to ask questions about this and I responded accordingly.

The sharing of my personal diary created a sense of trust and established a good rapport with the participants, as well as modelling the kind of approach I hoped they would take to their own diaries. This short induction was important: the literature proposes that diaries prepared for the purpose of the research should involve the diarist's documentation of particular activities or events, but only after receiving guidance from the researcher (Pole and Morrison, 1998: 58)

The participants were given the freedom to document what they wished, but during our conversations I also encouraged them to think about recording some of the following: their engagement with academic activities, involvement in socio-economic and cultural activities, challenges related to family, work and community, and bad and good moments experienced in their homes, offices and communities.

Students agreed to fill in their diaries regularly, and every three days I sent each student a greeting text message to their mobile phone as a reminder. I'm glad to report that their response was excellent. Towards the end of the voluntary sessions, I collected all of the diaries except for those of two participants who had become used

to the process and wanted to carry on doing them on a daily basis. Instead, they allowed me to photocopy their entries, after which I gave them their diaries back.

Because the participants had worked so faithfully in recording their daily experiences, I decided to offer them a token of appreciation from my research fund (Harmmersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, the process of documenting information in diaries was not linked to any financial agreement or prize. It was purely a voluntary activity.

Photographs

I used photography as a way of documenting information from the field sites. In doing so, I captured images from the students' own surroundings and at the regional centres. My focus here was on the students' learning environment. The photographs I took did not follow any specific format; instead, they were taken to shed light on the students' environments and to add authenticity to the study.

Unfortunately, I could not buy cameras for the students due to shortage of funds, although I did share several of the images with students during our discussions. For example, I used the photographs I had taken of the study material storage rooms, the computer laboratories and library to initiate discussions regarding teaching and learning support. I also used some of the images to supplement information I had gathered from interviews, documents and observations. Many of these are presented in my analysis and discussion chapters.

4.8 Data Analysis and Research Rigour

In this section, I discuss the data analysis procedures and the rigour and validity of the research undertaken during this study. Data analysis in qualitative research is a continuous activity (Cohen et al, 2011; Bryman, 2012) and, because I adopted an ethnographic research strategy involving several different methods, I had a large amount of data to work with.

I did not wait until I had finished field work to start arranging data in a systematic manner. Instead, I typed my field notes every day, continued with the transcription of

my interview scripts as I conducted my fieldwork, summarized information from official documents, downloaded photographs from my camera and attached memos accordingly.

4.8.1 Data Transcription and Translation

The data transcription process in this study followed the conducting of interviews. On average, I took five to eight hours to transcribe each interview script from my participants. Transcription can be problematic in that, depending on the approach taken, nuance can be lost via the omission of non-verbal cues such as pauses, laughter, anger and pitch which can be important aspects of the analysis (Cohen et al., 2011). The use of the tape recorder was very helpful in this regard as it gave me the opportunity to consider these non-verbal cues more fully when transcribing.

The transcription process was then followed by the translation of data into English. Nineteen of the student participants had opted to use Swahili during the interviews, so the task of translation was never going to be an easy one, especially as I had to ensure that I did not distort any of the information presented by my participants. In order to ensure the accuracy of the process and maintain the original meaning of the scripts, I requested the assistance of one of my colleagues from the Department of Linguistics at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The process involved comparing the transcribed scripts with the translated versions.

I had three data-related folders on my computer: the first stored digitally-recorded raw data from the field; the second folder stored the transcribed interviews with the original names and locations; while the third folder stored the transcribed and translated data but with changed names and locations so as to protect the identity of the participants and maintain confidentiality. All folders were password protected.

4.8.2 The Use of NVivo and Thematic Analysis

NVivo and Thematic Analysis

I used NVivo 9 and thematic analysis to facilitate the proper presentation of findings, analysis and discussion. The use of NVivo permitted me to organize, store and

retrieve all of the documents collected from the field sites (Richards, 1999; Flick, 2009). Apart from that my selection of a thematic analysis was connected to the long exposure to the data I experienced in the process of generation and transcription (Boyatzis, 1998). In fact thematic analysis deals with themes which may be generated inductively from field data or deductively from or deductively developed from theory and prior research (Boyatzis, 1998).

In thematic analysis a theme is defined as:

‘a pattern found in the information that at a minimum describes and organises the possible observations and at a maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon’ (Boyatzis, 1998:4).

As discussed in section 4.7.2 above, I used observations, documents and interviews to generate data. In doing so I had to constantly revise my data during field work until I was sure that I had enough information to meet my study needs. Once that was completed, I transcribed the interviews, typed the field notes, scanned information from the diaries and summarised my findings from the documents. I then stored the information inside the folders I had created in my computer.

I then imported the files to NVivo and considered using the photographs I had taken as an external file in the project. I also had access to each student’s biographical data such as age, sex, degree programme, entry qualification, marital status, occupation and location. These were kept under a node classification file. Access to all this information allowed me to use NVivo, as well as paper and pen to analyse the data. By reading through the data and reflecting on it, I was able to identify coding moments, attach memos and to generate categories and subcategories. These were later grouped as themes and presented as such in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

For example, all the information related to habitus such as students’ educational background, family history and their current experiences in teaching and learning at the OUT formed one theme. A second theme was related to the challenges and coping strategies which I derived according to experiences in the rural, domestic and academic fields of the OUT. The last major theme focused on support services and

participants' suggestions for improvement. I considered habitus as being central in this final theme as data on students' perceptions and experiences related to support practices in the identified fields and participants' suggestions for improvement were to be of particular interest to the study.

Thematic analysis as a method is not free from criticism: some of the literature posits that this type of analysis lacks a theoretical base when compared to other strategies such as grounded theory analysis (Cohen et al, 2011; Brayman, 2012). However for the purposes of this study, thematic analysis had pragmatic applicability in terms of enabling me to answer my research questions, and to apply my theoretical framework.

In the table below are examples of how themes were generated from the transcribed and translated data.

Label/ Sub-category	Category	Location	Main Theme
Costly Associated cost Cost of education Expensive Pay for Hidden Incur expenses	1. Expenses and other hidden costs of education	Academic field	Challenges facing rural students
Travel for a long time 40-180 km away Go there Very isolated We cannot meet I cannot communicate No people to share I cannot get information All alone No interaction Nowhere to run to	2. Distance, isolation and loneliness	Rural Field	

<p>Few copies of study materials</p> <p>Not enough space for studying</p> <p>Not enough study materials</p> <p>No books</p> <p>Few Books</p> <p>Books available not relevant to my course</p> <p>No Internet services at the centre</p> <p>Nothing for my course</p> <p>Not received a single copy of</p> <p>A shelf with few books</p> <p>Buying books as there is nothing for my course</p> <p>No access to Internet</p>	<p>3. Inadequate access to physical resources and learning spaces</p>	<p>Academic Field</p>	
<p>One tutor for science</p> <p>We meet rarely with our tutors</p> <p>No tutors at the regional centres except at the headquarters</p>	<p>4. Inadequate access to tutors</p>	<p>Academic Field</p>	
<p>Financial responsibilities</p> <p>Family requirements</p> <p>No one makes an appointment when coming to your house</p> <p>Interference from my children</p> <p>Commitments like family</p>	<p>5. Family Responsibilities and Requirements</p>	<p>Domestic Field</p>	

responsibilities			
A lot of time			
Affects my concentration			

Table 10: Theme formulation

4.8.3 Research Rigour and Validity

This section discusses the procedures I observed to ensure research rigour during the data generation and thesis writing processes. The focus is on ethical issues, reflexivity and the validity of the study.

Ethical Issues

My concern was to conduct an ethical study which was aware of potential harm (Flick, 2009; Hammersley and Traianou, 2012) but with a pragmatic approach which was committed to the quality of research and the generation of high quality data (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). I tried to be reflective at every stage of the study. For example, during the proposal stage I carefully observed research procedures provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). I also filled in the ethical approval forms from my University and presented my research proposal to the ‘Progression Board’ which gave me permission to conduct the study in Tanzania.

I received a research permit from Tanzania and focused on conducting a pilot study before generating data for my main study. I was very transparent during the data generation process and ensured that I documented all the findings and research activities that were performed in the field. All participants were fully informed as to the aims and process of the research, and I also required all participants to sign the consent form, which included consent for audio recording of the interviews (See Appendix one for consent form).

Although I took photographs of students’ homes and of the regional centres, I had already decided to focus on events and observable variables and avoid the use of

images of individual participants in order not to breach trust and invade students' privacy (Pink, 2009). Diaries collected from research participants were also safely stored under my custody.

Reflexivity

Bourdieu defines reflexivity as:

“a sense of location in terms of the relationship between the researcher and the object of the study” (Grenfell and James, 1998: 148).

This helped to remind me of my role as a qualitative researcher and to reflect on my relationship with the participants at the field sites.

First, I reflected on my position as a researcher and the influence I had as a tutor in the field of distance education. I explicitly stated my role in section 1.3.1 in the introductory chapter. It is, therefore, difficult to assess the influence I may have had on participants in the conduct of this study. However, my exposure to various research designs, particularly phenomenology, helped me to realize that researchers must be scrupulous in bracketing, as far as possible, their personal interests and prejudices so that their studies are not affected (Van Manen, 1990; Ehrich, 2003).

I successfully achieved this during data generation by letting the participants guide the study, with very few interventions on my part. However, I did use my knowledge and experience to guide the analysis and discussion. I also considered anonymity and confidentiality issues during the analysis and discussion by assigning new names, letters, and ranks in order to safeguard the identities of the participants and their regional centres. It might be said that I used reflexivity like a mirror to both diagnose and solve the inevitable problems that arose during data generation, analysis and writing.

Validity

Validity in qualitative research is associated with the authentic nature of a study's findings and the conclusions derived from that piece of work (Bryman, 2008; 2012). It also refers to the practice of investigation, checking, questioning and theorising (Kvale, 1989). However, the term validity and its application in qualitative research is highly contested. Validity is mostly associated with quantitative research design which differs in methodology and philosophical stance from a qualitative study (Crotty, 1998; Shenton, 2004).

The objective nature of a quantitative study and its methodological procedures makes it possible to verify findings in a scientific manner, unlike the observations in a qualitative study which are argued to be subjective and hence make it difficult to validate findings and establish research rigour (Whittemore et al, (2001). However, the literature on the subject rejects this critique and posits that validity can be established by observing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Cho and Trent, 2006).

For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that validity can be attained while reflecting on credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. However, others are of the opinion that the use of member checks, audit trails, data collection, thick descriptions of phenomena, triangulation and peer debriefings all help to maintain validity in qualitative research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Shenton, 2004; Cresswell, 2009; 2014; Merriam, 2009; Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, considerations on issues such as honesty, trust, and the depth, richness and scope of the data achieved are critical when validating information (Cohen et al, 2011).

However, the ways to validate qualitative studies proposed above are also questionable as they are used as a means of evaluation after completion of the research (Morse et al, 2002). By doing so, crucial parts of the research process and researchers' reflexivity are omitted (Morse et al, 2002). It is proposed, therefore, that verification strategies such as researchers' responsiveness, methodological

coherence, theoretical sampling, an active analytic stance and saturation need to be observed when verifying validity (Morse et al, 2002:17).

We can see that there are two positions which emerge from this debate. One focuses on developing a certain set of criteria that will be used to evaluate validity (post-study measures), while the other focuses on reflexivity in methodology and the researchers' position. Both stances are critical as they complement each other and are significant in terms of maintaining research vigour in qualitative studies. Whittemore et al (2001) sum up this debate by saying that we need to:

‘determine the validity ideals of a particular study (criteria),
employ the optimal methodological techniques, and to
critically present the research process in detail’(535).

From this, we can see that there is no single way of establishing validity in qualitative studies as the process is iterative and requires reflexivity in the process. For these reasons I had to seriously think about my own research design, ontology, data generation processes, analysis and writing procedures.

For example, I had to triangulate data across participants (tutors, students and administrators) as I had a wide range of people involved in the study. This allowed the verification of information and helped to improve trust. However, this practice may also be open to challenge as the literature associates such practices to the invasion of privacy and possibly even to breaching confidentiality (Murchison, 2010). Nevertheless, that was not the intention; the purpose was to ensure research vigour.

I also triangulated different research methods (interviews, documents and observations) in order to overcome any weaknesses or biases posed by the use of a single method. This enabled me to utilise the respective benefits of each specific research method, and was also useful in verifying the accuracy of specific data items (Cho and Trent, 2006). For example, information gathered from interviews with participants was also verified through the use of documents and observations. This is

referred to as cross-checking and is used as an additional means of establishing validity (Bryman, 2008)

In relation to data generation processes, I spent a significant time (eight months) in the field in order to generate some rich thick descriptive data as required by the adopted research design. This assisted in understanding participants' views and their contexts. The data generation process and my prolonged engagement in the field enabled me to develop an adequate understanding of students' contexts and helped to establish relationships of trust with the participants.

I was also able to document each research procedure and provide an in-depth methodological description in Chapter Four in order to establish the integrity of my study. Through my engagement in the field I was also able to reflect on my position as insider in the process of data generation as I was involved in conversations with participants and undertook observations of events and activities.

I also carried out a member check by presenting the transcribed data to a number of participants, although all were not available. Carrying out such a process undoubtedly helped to establish the credibility of the research (Cho and Trent, 2006). Moreover, the data analysis processes followed the inductive processes. This allowed for a thorough representation of participants' voices in this study, as presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. In short, I used my skills of observation, knowledge and personal reflection to ensure that the validity and meaning attached to the data generated in this study was maintained (Genzuck, 2003).

4.9 Summary

This chapter has presented methodological issues which formed the basis for the data generation processes in this qualitative study. Below is a summary of this chapter in diagrammatic form.

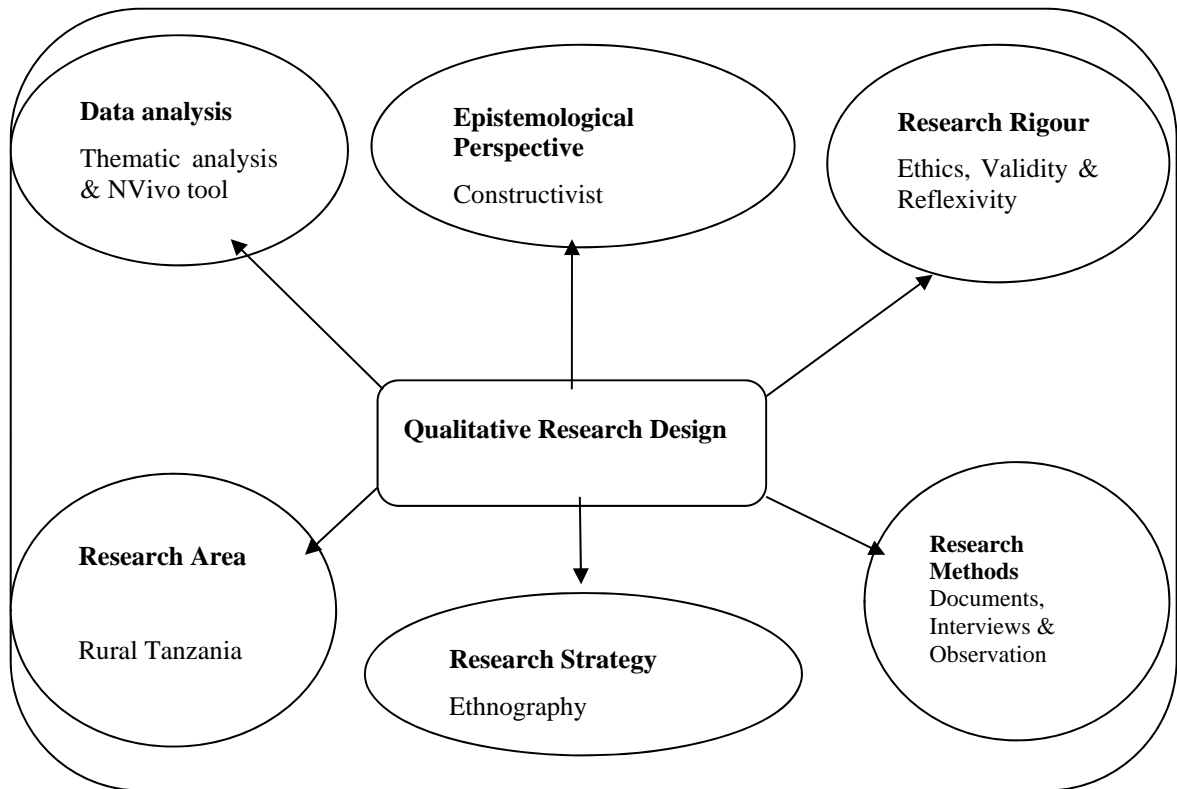


Figure 7: A Diagrammatic presentation of the research methodology for the study

Life worlds 4: Christian – Regional Centre D

Introduction

Christian is a young student, aged 20-29, who is studying for a Bachelor of Law degree at the OUT. During this study Christian was in his fourth year and hoped to complete his studies before the start of the new academic year. He intended to sit his final examinations in June, 2011, although I met him in February of that year.

My request to visit Christian's home took him by surprise as he couldn't believe that I would want to travel all the way to his town. Instead, he thought I would have asked him to come to town and have our purposeful conversation there. He invited me to come on a Saturday afternoon as he was fully engaged with office work during week days. It would take about four hours to get to his home from region D, although the village he lived in was quite close to the district town.

I took a bus to his locality and arrived earlier than our planned time, so I decided to explore the area and then have lunch in a restaurant. At the restaurant, I was offered rice, 'matoke' (cooked banana), and 'ugali' (food made from maize mill), with 'migebuga' (fish from a cold water lake). I ended up eating matoke and migebuga. It was the first time I had eaten this kind of fish but I enjoyed it as it was soft and delicious, and a little like 'king fish' from salt water.

Meeting Christian

I called Christian and told him that I had arrived. To my surprise he came to pick me up at the restaurant and then drove me to his home in a white saloon car. I immediately sensed the economic power of this student.

His Home

The design of his building was not very different from other homes I had visited. His house, which was situated in a wide open space, was made of fired blocks and had an iron roof. The house was rented and shared with other tenants in the compound. The sitting room was simple, but modern, consisting of attractive leather couches, a music system, a medium TV screen, with a laptop on the dining table. There was a

significant difference between the quality of items observed in the sitting room, and the physical appearance of the house in general.

Christian had a small generator which he used during the evening. The cost of fuel meant that he could only use the generator for three to four hours. During this period, he could have a light on in the sitting room, watch the news, and surf and download materials on the Internet as he had a modem from one of the mobile phone companies, while at night he used a kerosene lamp. Christian was married but his wife was not there as she was away taking a degree course at one of the conventional universities.

His Work and the culture of People in His Area

Christian was employed as a magistrate in the district, having qualified with a diploma in law. After completing his advanced secondary education, he worked as a registered clerk grade II in one of the courts. He later enrolled for the diploma studies course and was posted to his present rural district where he had been working for over five years. Christian complained that he did not have enough time to study as he had to work until late and sometimes had to bring work home.

Christian was not familiar with the culture of the people in his locality as he was too engaged with his office and personal work. Apart from working as a magistrate in region D, Christian was also engaged in a number of small businesses. As an entrepreneur in the rural region, he had a shop and a small restaurant. He said these activities consumed most of his time and he mainly studied at the weekend.

His Family and Educational Background

Christian is the fifth child in a family of seven children. He was born into an educated family, his father and mother being graduates and civil servants in the government. Christian pursued his primary and secondary education in the conventional system and had full support from his family, although he was not selected to go to a public school after completion of his primary school studies. Instead, his parents enrolled him at a private school where he completed his ordinary and advanced secondary education, obtaining a second division certificate.

Unfortunately, he did not gain selection to university due to the fierce competition, so, instead, his parents found a job for him and he carried on with his studies at a later date.

As well as the encouragement given to him by his parents, Christian was also motivated by the academic, social and economic achievements of his elder sisters and brothers. Unfortunately, his father died after Christian completed his diploma, and so will not be there to see him graduating from the OUT, as Christian would have wished.

His Current Studies

Christian enrolled at the OUT with a Diploma as his qualification, although he said the OUT was not his first choice of university. He had obtained a second division certificate in his advanced secondary education, but unfortunately the government was only sponsoring those who had achieved a first division award. Female applicants with his qualifications, however, were selected and sponsored for the law programme during his time. Their inclusion was possible because of the policy of widening access to education for females in higher education.

After working for some few years as a court clerk and studying for a Diploma in Law, Christian decided to enrol at the OUT. He explained that the OUT could accommodate his desire to study while still allowing him to work and earn a living. He acknowledged that the abilities gained in his Diploma course were very relevant to his current education. He had good teachers, and his course was well supplemented with learning materials. He said that he devoted much of his weekends to study and was confident he could complete his studies in his fourth year.

His Perceptions of Teaching and Learning at the OUT

Christian's perceptions of teaching and learning processes at the OUT were both positive and negative. For example, he praised the OUT for providing access to education to more people, saying that there were many people who were still in need of education. He was also happy that the OUT provided students with printed study materials and administrative support from the regional centre. On the other hand, he

believed there was a lack of tutors in his area of specialization, meaning that OUT students like him were largely self-taught.

Christian managed his own OUT education by taking advantage of the additional learning resources that were available. For example, he downloaded materials from the Internet, although in the process of doing so he had to top up money to his modem whenever he required Internet access. He also faced challenges in accessing his results in SARIS as some were not recorded; therefore he planned to visit Dar es Salaam headquarters to seek clarification on this and other outstanding matters. Interestingly, Christian also talked about the lack of flexibility in relation to university activities, saying that the OUT treated distance students like conventional students. His view was that the tight timetable made it difficult for distance students to participate in some of the activities at the regional centre.

Christian's participation in induction courses and face-to-face sessions was rare because it meant he would have had to ask for time off from his employer. He also complained bitterly about the removal of the open book examination for law students, believing that the use of the 'Statute' in examinations helped students to develop an understanding of various sections of the law, the knowledge of which would be an asset in their work. He said the reason for its removal was associated with cheating. Christian argued that if students were forbidden to bring their own statute, then surely the university could provide one for examination purposes.

His main wish was that the university would improve its practices and support rural distance students in their education. He said that students like him came from challenging and complex social contexts and often did not have sufficient resources to study successfully. I met Christian again at the regional centre in June when he came to bring the diary I had left him. He had completed his final year examination and was waiting for the results, and was still optimistic that he would graduate this year as planned.

5 Chapter Five: Teaching and Learning Practices at the Open University of Tanzania: Rural Students' Habitus and their Experiences in the Fields

5.1 Introduction

This chapter marks the beginning of the data analysis and discussion. Specifically, this chapter examines the teaching and learning practices at the OUT while Chapter Six discusses the students' challenges and coping strategies. Chapter Seven looks at the available support in the rural, domestic and academic fields of the OUT and examines the students' needs for support services and participants' suggestions for improvement.

My analysis in these chapters focuses on the concepts of habitus and field, as elaborated by Bourdieu (1977, 1990). In Chapter Three, section 3.5.2, I described a field as a social space with structured activities and practices (Bourdieu, 1990). It includes agents such as – the case of my study – tutors, students and administrators, who bring in various forms of capital in order to occupy and maintain positions in the field. The capital in the field is subject to constant competition due to its scarcity. My research defined three fields: namely, the domestic (home), rural (employment and community) and academic (OUT) fields.

Habitus in this study is defined as:

‘an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted. It engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions consistent with those conditions, and no others’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 95).

In this study I view habitus in relation to the students' past educational and family history, and the influence of these on their current education in the academic field of the OUT. It is also observed in terms of the students' teaching and learning experiences in the fields they are required to study in.

The purpose of analysing my data through the lens of both habitus and field was to understand the dispositions of students and their trajectories. The discussion in the

following three chapters will also draw on the literature on distance education and support practices in order to support my analysis.

This chapter is divided into six sub-sections. The first section presents an introduction to the chapter while the students' educational and family histories, and the influence these have on their current studies are described in section two. The students' reasons for entering the academic field and their motives for learning are discussed in section three, while in the fourth section deals with the teaching, learning, interaction and communication processes in the rural, academic, and domestic fields are presented. Section five discusses information on how students study and provides descriptions of the learning environments in which they study; the chapter ends with a summary and conclusion.

5.2 Students' Habitus and its Influence on Studies in the Academic Field

This section deals with students' families and students' educational habitus. It also explores the influence of students' habitus on their current studies in the academic field of the OUT.

5.2.1 Students' Family Habitus

Habitus is associated with the past formation of structures that connect family and educational experiences (Grenfell and James, 1998). The habitus connected to the family and the educational background of students was explored in this study with the purpose of understanding students' past experiences, and their influence on students' current studies. The study started with an understanding of students' socio-historical backgrounds, which, in turn, revealed the existence of varying kinds of habitus.

These kinds included rural, rural-urban, and urban habitus. A purely rural habitus indicated that the student was born, educated, employed, and grew up in a rural environment. These students' exposure to urban settings was related to social reasons, and not to educational or economic purposes. Students with a rural-urban

habitus were born in rural areas, grew up there, but received part of their education in an urban area, as well as a rural area, and were eventually employed in the rural area.

Students with an urban habitus were those who were born, grew up, and studied in urban areas, but who were employed in a rural area.

My study found that students who grew up and studied in urban areas were better able to establish networks of support, sharing knowledge and experiences with former colleagues who were still based in town. This was a key resource for their educational development. Students with an urban habitus also tended to have access to the necessary economic capital that enabled them to attend good schools, gain access to learning resources and so facilitate their academic success. This is illustrated by the following extracts from interviews:

I was not very intelligent during my schooling. I was not selected to join the public secondary schools. My father paid for my ordinary and advanced level secondary education. After that I was not selected to join university education as I had a second division. The competition was so stiff but my parents secured a job for me. I started as register Clerk grade II and later I joined the diploma in law. (Christian)

I am lucky that my father and brothers were all educated. They helped me to go to school as well (David).

These students had role models at home who guided and encouraged them to access education, regardless of their abilities or interests. Christian, for example, did not seem to have been a particularly bright student with a great interest in school. It was, however, the cultural and economic capital of Christian's father that inspired him. He said,

"I was always with my father who all the time reminded me of the importance of education in the present world. He was of the view that one could only be successful if educated. My late father was a government employee, and he always said it was education which made him successful in life. He told us to study hard and become something in life" (Christian).

The advantages possessed by Christian, above, are deep-rooted, and come from the economic and cultural capital of his family; however, these advantages are not found

in every family in the rural developing world, primarily because of poverty and restricted access to education (Khan, 2001; Sugata, 2008; Aikaeli, 2010).

Contrary to Christian's experience, the majority of students (19) out of (24) had uneducated parents and came from a poor family background. Their families depended on agricultural activities to make a living. One of the students in the 50-59 age group said that his desire to acquire education was not associated with his family, but with his neighbour, whose sons had been educated. He often admired their personalities when they went to the village. Moreover, he argued that it was his neighbours' ability to support their parents that triggered his interest in studying. Unfortunately, he himself had poor parents, but this did not stop him from aspiring to a better education.

In spite of poverty and the lack of educational exposure among students' parents with a rural habitus, these parents had enough wisdom and passion to motivate their children to go to school. Students, for example, were grateful to their parents for the advice they had given them, and for the sacrifices they had made. Two made the following comments:

My mother is like a queen of England in my life. You know my father died when I was in primary four. My mother wished I could become a medical doctor. She used to tell me forward forever, backward never. She is a rural woman but very brave (Daniel).

I highly appreciate the contribution of my parents though they were not educated; their advice was superb (Bakari).

Such examples of motivation, wisdom, praise, and encouragement still have an impact today, even in the current education of rural students, who believe that they can continue to better themselves, perhaps even beyond their studies at the OUT.

Findings also revealed that the level of poverty among rural students caused some of the students to delay their entry into higher education, despite their encouraging performance at secondary school. These delays were influenced by their desire to assist their siblings to acquire a decent education. For example, Catherine chose to reject higher education, opting instead to complete a two-year primary teaching course in order to be employed, and thus secure her family's status. She said,

“I had to stay at home when I was in secondary school to help my siblings. So I couldn’t go to the University straight away. I had first division in my national form four examinations, but I thought of the shortest way to get employment in order to help my young ones” (Catherine).

Similarly, another student said:

I am the second born in my family. My sister is physically disabled. My father died when I was in teachers’ college, taking the diploma in education in 1995. I was forced to take responsibility for the family. I know the value of education and I made sure my young ones are all educated (Lambertha).

Other students from a number of different age groups claimed that they had been the first to go to school in their families, and so they had the burden of helping their siblings and the immediate family affiliates. This occurrence really illustrates the difference between those who were privileged to access education with no strings attached, from those who had the burden of improving the social and economic status of their families. Constraints and difficulties such as these probably influenced the desire of these students to obtain a degree, and so transform their lives.

As Bourdieu (1990) said, habitus has the power to structure and restructure itself to suit certain conditions in the social field. This is certainly exemplified by the students in this study. For example, the students’ family childhood histories and educational paths have now been structured and partly transformed by their engagement in the world of work. The proof of this is that they are now employed and live in rural areas. Their past is now, therefore, embodied. However, the students’ past education can be interpreted as being part of a structured habitus that can either help or hinder their ability to succeed in the current academic field. This issue is discussed in the next section.

5.2.2 Students’ Educational Habitus

In this section, I will focus on the habitus of students, which is normally associated with education and its influence on the students’ current position, or place, in the academic field. My study found that the sampled student participants had passed through different systems of education.

Some passed through the conventional system which meant they had to attend full-time classes from primary school level to advanced secondary school education, while some progressed to diploma level. Others enrolled in a non-formal system of education which allowed them to study at evening classes, or as a private candidate, sitting examinations in secondary, or advanced secondary education without being affiliated to any institution. Participants said evening programmes were mostly run by the Institute of Adult Education, and by private investors.

These systems of education led me to conclude that distance students in rural areas have two types of habitus: the 'conventional system habitus', and the 'mixed habitus'. The conventional habitus is related to students who study throughout the conventional system, from primary to advanced secondary education, or even to diploma level. For example, when Abel was asked to share details of his educational background, he stated:

'I started with kindergarten and went on to primary school in 1992 at (.....), and then I went for a private secondary education (1998-2002). Later I joined (.....) for advanced secondary education where I did Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics' (Abel).

The long exposure Abel experienced in the conventional system, from kindergarten through to advanced secondary school, enabled him to embody this system and adapt to its structure.

Abel's educational path, above, appears to have been quite straightforward. However, his experience is not the same as that of other students, such as Allen, who revealed during our conversation that he had a mixed habitus that derived from him spending years in both conventional and non-conventional systems of education. Allen passed through a formal primary school education, before moving on to an ordinary secondary school education and then to diploma level. He also joined an 'evening study programme' which he attended during his advanced secondary education. These two educational systems are very different; therefore, Allen had to adjust accordingly to develop his mixed habitus.

***Student:** Well, I started my primary education in 1982. After my primary education I stayed home for about 3 years as I was not selected to join any public secondary*

schools and my parents were poor. In 1991, my uncle took me to a secondary school which was managed by the Parents' Association. Thereafter, I was selected to join the teachers' college at (.....) where I completed my training in 1997 as a grade 'A' teacher.

Lulu: *Mmh!*

Student: *But we were not employed immediately. So I went to work at (.....) on a voluntary basis and I studied as a private candidate student for form five and six, and in 2000 I did my national examination.*

Lulu: *What an interesting story, 'Allen'. What did you do after your advanced secondary education?*

Student: *I joined teachers' college and studied the diploma in education. Thereafter, I was employed as a secondary school teacher at (.....).*

Abel and Allen's backgrounds have strong implications for the educational system at the OUT. For example, the background of Abel and others with a 'conventional system' habitus may pose challenges in the field of distance higher education, as the structures they have previously studied within are so different from those of the OUT. For instance, they consistently referred back to their old practices:

In my previous studies, I used to find teachers in place and they were of great assistance. The system was more convenient for my academic advancement. But now things are hard (Jonathan).

I used to be provided with all the learning materials. Also, I had access to teachers all the time. But at the OUT a teacher is a rare commodity (Alex).

I remember having adequate books and great support from the teachers. Apart from that we were very close to the learning resources in my college. I would say my diploma in law is like a key in my present studies as I still use the same books. (Christian).

The students' statements above demonstrate the differences between the pedagogical practices of the distance education system and the conventional system. Students with a habitus informed by the conventional system were used to tutor support, lectures, and direct access to learning materials, while the *modus operandi* in the academic field of the OUT requires students to study independently of tutors (Moore, 1983, 1986; Keegan, 1996). Therefore, students with a conventional habitus often struggled to come to terms with the new practices of the academic field of the distance university.

On the other hand my study also observed that students with previous experience of studying independently in evening classes and as private candidates were, in some respects, at an advantage. For example, students in evening classes spent most of their time outside the institutional context as they studied at home or in other areas. Similarly, those who studied as private candidates mainly studied on their own, although some had private tutor support. Regarding the advantages gained by studying as private candidates, or in evening studies, students said:

My previous education is very useful to my present studies. I can just decide what to do without asking for tutor guidance. Believe me, studying as a private candidate at my advanced level made me very independent. Otherwise the OUT would not be a place for me to study (Alpha).

What I studied a long time ago has relevance in my current education. I remember having very good teachers at diploma level. They taught us to be independent in the learning process. Actually, I still apply their techniques in my current education (Christian).

The students' comments above demonstrate that many of them are well-prepared to meet the challenges they face in studying within the academic field of the OUT, in that they appear to apply the skills and techniques acquired in their former system of education to guide their studies in the new field. Their habitus, therefore, has found structures that are similar to those of their earlier experiences though they are not identical.

The experiences that students with a mixed habitus demonstrate have the potential to be used as a resource in the academic field. For example, these students appear to possess a knowledge and understanding of the conduct of distance learning that could be shared by those with a conventional habitus, given the proper communication and interaction.

5.3 Reasons for Students Entering the Academic Field and their Motives for Learning

In this section I will focus on the reasons students gave for entering distance education and what their motives are in pursuing a university degree.

5.3.1 Reasons for Entering the Academic Field of the OUT

Students gave a number of different reasons for entering the academic field of the OUT. These included job security, the lack of time to study full-time programmes, family commitments, the lack of sponsorship, the difficulty in gaining admission to other universities, the low cost of education, the low qualifications that were necessary for admission and instructions from employers. Some of the participants said:

My position requires that I be a degree holder. If I don't get a degree, someone else will take my position and I can also not afford to go to the full time programmes as somebody will take my position (Neema).

I am the head of this section; my employer would never allow me to go for a full-time programme unless I resign from this position (Daniel).

I discovered that the OUT could help me because I would be at home with my family, and at the same time study and work (Bakari).

I found out that studying through distance learning was not expensive. I thought I could manage it. I decided to enrol with the OUT (Alpha).

I was not aware of the OUT. But I received a letter from my employer urging me to join the OUT. I was also told my education would be funded by the government (Abel).

I completed my form six back in 2003 and I got a second Division. I applied for admission to three universities. But I could not be admitted because of sponsorship regulations (Christian).

It was not easy to access university education as there were few universities and the competition for the few universities was stiff (Jonathan).

I felt like I was not qualified to go to a conventional university. But I later realized that I had enough qualifications to be admitted to the OUT (Bakari).

These factors confirm the relationship with the stated functions of distance education, as indicated in the literature. These functions are said to include: cost effectiveness, accessibility to unreachable areas, and flexible educational practices (Rumble, 1997, 2000; Dhanarajan, 2001; UNESCO, 2002; Daniel 2007; Juman and Zai, 2009; Olakulehin and Panda, 2011; Krishnan, 2012). However, what is new here is the association between the reasons students give for selecting an academic field, and their habitus.

Students' family histories also contribute towards their selection of an academic field. Many of them were responsible for improving their families' socio-economic status, which clearly influenced their decision to study through a system that is cost effective. In addition, not having the opportunity to attend full-time education is a particular feature of students' employment in the rural field, usually because of family circumstances that require their constant presence there. Work demands and family ties, therefore, are significant contributory factors in students' selections of an academic field.

Furthermore, there is a lack of access to the conventional universities because of high competition and a lack of sponsorship. This emphasises the existing problems of social and cultural capital which are crucial in helping students to access higher education, and such limitations were clearly critical factors in these students' decision to opt instead for an academic field that is both flexible and cost effective.

However, this is not to say that the OUT accommodates students with low marks: I found that students with good results chose the OUT because of work and family commitments. Moreover, the OUT provides the opportunity for rural students to study in their own locations while managing their socio-economic activities.

It can be argued that the reasons for students selecting the OUT can be put into two categories: first, the influence of their past education, location, family and socio-economic status; and second, the advantages accrued by this particular academic field, which other systems of education in Tanzania could not match. Therefore, it is important to take account of students' reasons for entering the academic field when considering how access to university education in rural areas can be widened.

5.3.2 Motives for Students' Learning in the Academic Field

This section discusses students' motives for pursuing a university education at the OUT. The interviews with students revealed that students' motives for learning were personal and mainly economic. I will begin by presenting and analysing the personal motives of students, many of which were associated with feelings of personal satisfaction.

Personal Motives

I take degree studies for prestige. I want people to recognise me as a degree holder (Samwel).

Having a degree at hand would place me in the world of elites, and I would be respected like other degree holders in my office (Sebalela).

I want it because most of the people have degrees, not diplomas any more. I think to have a degree is a good thing; you earn respect and recognition in the community (Koletha).

Once I get my degree I will belong to the group of intellectuals (Zainab).

Once you have a degree you get a higher status and you definitely belong to the group of educated people (Abel).

The quotes above indicate that students' motives in completing a university education are often associated with recognition, prestige, status and respect. Again, we see students' habitus as entangled with these motives. As pointed out earlier, students emerged from two types of families: middle class families, and poor, uneducated families. Some needed to transform their past identities and position, while others had a duty to maintain the status of their families. It is also possible as well that employment in their present positions in the rural field could also influence students to study in order to gain respect, recognition, prestige, and to achieve a change in status.

There is a real sense of purpose in students' personal motives. For example, Bourdieu once equated the honour and prestige of university teachers as being symbolic capital that is obtained after exposure to other forms of capital such as social, economic, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Grenfell and James, 1998). In the case of these rural students, there was a strong associated desire to obtain cultural and economic capital. Such motivation encourages these students to invest their time and economic resources in the expectation of acquiring the stated symbolic capital.

Economic Motives

Students' economic motives, which I will discuss in this section, seemed to vary according to age. Young and middle-aged adults (20-49) had different motives from the few more mature adults in the 50-59 age-groups. For example, the findings in my

study show that motives such as acquiring rewarding jobs, earning promotion, and gaining competence were mainly associated with a group of young and middle-aged students. On the other hand, the few mature students sampled in my study were more concerned to obtain a good retirement package, especially as retirement benefits in Tanzania vary according to one's level of education. However, both sets of age groups were intent on increasing their salaries and improving their living standards.

Students said this in relation to jobs, promotion, and the development of competence:

I expect, if all goes well, to find a good rewarding job and start lucrative projects (Shaban).

It is a question of increasing my income. The more one gets educated, the better the salary. You know I want to live comfortably; my current salary is too small (David).

I need to get a higher salary and make sure that my children get a proper education to avoid the impending problems (Catherine).

I am studying at the OUT as I have my aspirations. You know, an East African federation is around the corner. We need to be flexible in looking for jobs, and we won't be capable of competing without good certificates. For example, my wish is to teach Kiswahili in our East African Community. That is why I am doing the Bachelor of Education course (Kiswahili) (Shaban).

My salary will go up and that will give me a better chance to help my family. I know some of my friends who completed their studies; they became heads of schools and some district education officers (James).

I study in order to get a high salary and be promoted (Wilson).

This degree would help me gain competence and probably look for a good job (Allen).

I simply want to possess skills and knowledge in order to manage my work (Adolf).

In relation to retirement/pension benefits, students said:

One of my motives for studying for a degree is to get a good pension package after retirement (Lambertha).

It is obvious that if you get a degree your salary would increase, but most importantly that your pension would also be higher on retirement (Samwel).

Once you retire as a degree holder, the retirement benefits are higher than that of a diploma or certificate holder (Catherine).

The students' comments convey the expectation that by investing in building cultural capital through participation in the academic field of the OUT, they will then manage to increase their economic capital, and hence transform their lives in socio-economic terms.

The motives discussed by the students above were similar to the motivation classification provided by Beaty, Gibbs and Morgan (1997). These include social, vocational, academic, and personal orientations. Academic motives relate to obtaining good grades and making significant academic progress, while social motives relate to enjoying some kind of social life while studying at the university.

Learning orientations such as personal and vocational relate to the personal and economic motives identified in this study. In general, students' motivation for learning was related to obtaining qualifications and changing their status, rather than to academic and social orientations or motivations. Students' motives in my study were not associated with learning for creativity, or learning for the sake of learning, or even with happiness (Biesta, 2011; McArthur, 2011).

The students' motives, it could be argued, relate invariably to their habitus, which is associated with their current jobs, family and educational background. It was noted in section 5.1.1 that the majority (19) of rural students grew up in poor families. Therefore, the ambition of these students to attain increased economic capital is not a surprise. For example, one student said:

“Had it not been for that uneducated woman in my village, I wouldn't have been in this office today. Her wisdom and the little resources she had made me what I am today (Daniel)”.

The poor, uneducated woman was Daniel's mother who ensured he had access to education. Such memories are difficult to erase as they are deeply embedded in the conditions that still exist in rural communities today. However, students like Daniel will continue to use memories of their upbringing as motivation to improve their economic status.

Most of the students in my study came from rural villages. The literature tells us that in developing countries like Tanzania many people are still poor and depend on

agricultural produce for survival (URT, 2001, 2005; Khan, 2001; Ellis and Mdoe, 2003; Tacoli, 2004; Kelles-Viitanen, 2005; Aikaeli, 2010). It is understandable, therefore, that many of these students carry memories of their past, even though their current position might be as members of the middle class.

On the other hand, a number of students revealed that their current salaries in the rural field were so low that they could not meet their particular social and economic needs. It is a combination of these varying circumstances that served to inspire the economic motives of the students observed in this study. Indeed, it soon becomes obvious to the observer why academic and social motives play a much less significant role in the lives of rural students.

The exposure of students to educational practices, and their personal engagement with work as middle class citizens, helped them to appreciate the value of education, and of investing in it. In addition, the findings on students' economic and personal motives in my study align with a particular role of the university identified in the literature: to produce human resources that meet the expectations of the labour market (Barnett, 1992, 2011; Collini, 2012).

Although we saw earlier universities have several other purposes (Barnett, 1992), rural students enrol in the academic field mainly for economic reasons. There is a need for the academic field, therefore, to ensure that students gain access to cultural capital and thus increase their intellectual competence so that they have a greater chance of turning this into economic capital in the labour market.

However, the purpose of educational provision through the OUT should not just be about preparing human resources. It should also aim at developing research skills, intellectual inquiry, and improvement through critical commentary skills (Barnett, 1992, 2011; Collini, 2012). Arguably, these are also educational outcomes that are fundamental to the labour market as they enrich the personal lives of people and allow them to make decisions and take formal and informal leadership roles in their communities.

5.4 Teaching, Learning, Interaction and Communication Processes in the Rural, Academic and Domestic Fields

This section presents the teaching, learning, and communication processes as observed and described by students.

5.4.1 Teaching and Learning Practices in the Academic Field

Teaching and learning in distance education are separated in time and space (Keegan, 1996; 2000). Teaching is an institutional activity, while learning needs to be carried out by the students themselves. It is the effective provision of support services that merge the two processes together. The documents reviewed at the OUT reveal that teaching is carried out through the use of print media, ICT, and face-to-face sessions (OUT, 2011b), as interviews with participants' administrators confirm:

The current teaching is based on the use of technology (Adolf).

In general, the teaching and learning process at the OUT is organized face-to-face (Allen).

I go to the regional centres and take study materials (Shabani).

We have a face-to-face session for the continuing students and the newly admitted students (Director Regional Centre C).

They are self-directed learners. We give them the study materials and conduct face-to-face sessions (Director Regional Centre A).

Well, we give them the study materials and audio-tapes; and we give them addresses for searching for study materials in our website (Director –Regional Centre B).

The mode of teaching adopted at the OUT is in line with other methods of delivery used in distance education, such as print and non-print media (Keegan, 1996, 2000; Moore and Kearsley, 2005, 2012; Bates, 2005). However, the findings from the students above indicate that they were more familiar with face-to-face contacts and the use of self-taught printed study materials, than they were with ICT. Only Adolf, above, hinted at the use of technology at the OUT. Indeed, it is possible that Adolf is conversant with the use of technology in distance education as he may have had access to computer facilities at his locality, although this was certainly not the case with other students.

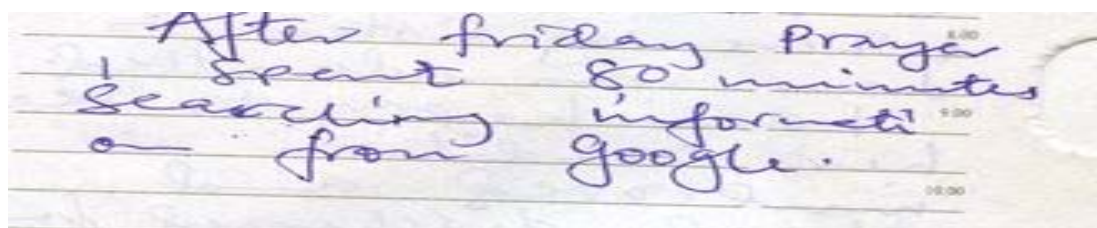
Information Communication Technology (ICT) Online

The OUT uses Moodle and e-mail to enable students to gain access to course content. It also has a website which the students appreciated. One of them reported: “*I access information and even reading materials from the university website. It is quite helpful*” (**Daniel**). Other students also confirmed that they used the online materials that were provided and those that were available through the World Wide Web to facilitate their studying.

I try to access the Internet services in an Internet café and download materials based on the course outlines provided (**Wilson**).

I use my own laptop for studying. I go to the mission centre to access electricity and the Internet (**Shabani**).

Well, since I am so much tied up with my office work, my study is basically on the Internet. I just get limited time here and there, but the Internet is the main source of my learning. (**Christian**).



” After Friday prayer I spent eighty minutes searching information from Google.”

The responses from students and the diary entry above indicate that students used personal laptops and Internet cafes to access online teaching resources, and also used online services to search for educational materials. However, online resources are not readily available to rural students because of the lack of electricity and Internet facilities in the rural communities. For example, the two students above disclose that they had to travel to access electricity and Internet facilities. Such an experience is not unusual as it is shared by the majority of rural students. Therefore, further action by the OUT is required to ensure that rural students can access online teaching and learning services.

Audio Tapes

Course content was also delivered through audio tapes. Students were expected to use the audio tapes as a study aid, although only one student from regional centre B seemed to be aware of their availability.

He said, 'I use audio recorded tapes for learning. The tapes are at the regional centreyes, for example, I listened to audio tapes on education and I understood the content very well' (Jonathan).

I sought clarification from OUT officials regarding the use of these audio tapes as I thought these would be of great assistance to students, particularly when reflecting on the infrastructural challenges that students face in rural areas. However, I was told that the tapes had been formerly used by visually impaired students, but that the system was now out of date and was to be replaced with a new computer-based system. It is not unreasonable to assume that many students will have problems with accessing such a system.

Face-to Face Sessions

Drop-in Sessions

Face-to-face teaching at the OUT is based on three types of meetings. The first is a student's drop-in session with tutors at the regional centres. Students said:

Anytime I have a problem I contact them for help. For example, I go to the regional centre and contact my history teacher for assistance (Alex).

Many times we contact and discuss with tutors on a face-to-face basis but also through the use of mobile phones (Allen).

Students are able to contact tutors during drop-in sessions to discuss their academic problems. Clearly, the tutor role is important in enabling students to succeed in their studies. However, problems such as distance, transport and money seemed to hinder rural students' participation in the drop in sessions.

Scheduled Face-to-face Sessions

A second type of meeting was based on University scheduled face-to-face sessions which were organised on an annual basis. These sessions were conducted in collaboration with tutors at the regional centres, and with those at OUT headquarters. Students said:

We have face-to-face sessions which are normally held for three days, once a year. That is the time we ask questions and get guidance from tutors (Adolf).

We have some face-to-face sessions where lecturers from headquarters come to the regional centre and direct us on what to do in our studies (Ezekiel).

The pre-arranged face-to-face sessions are carried out over a few days and involve tutors from headquarters. Students are, in principle, able to use these sessions obtain guidance from tutors that help them to manage their academic concerns. This was verified by a student who commented:

“A face-to-face session is nice, it is really important, especially if you manage to see the tutors for your subject during the session. You get good assistance and you feel good” (Catherine).

However, as Catherine hints, it might be difficult for students to speak to a particular tutor because of the lack of availability of subject-specific academics. The value of the face-to-face session is well documented in the literature as it allows interaction, the exchange of ideas, and enables students to develop the sense of belonging to a group (Chadibe, 2002; Simpson, 2002; Chandran, 2011).

I had the opportunity to participate in person in a 2010/2011 face-to-face session which was held in the hired hall of regional centre B. The entire session was expected to last for one week. Unfortunately, it was only over the first two days that students took part, and as soon as the Students' Progress Portfolio (SPP) assessments were completed, the majority of students left. The face-to-face sessions were then transferred from the hired hall to the regional centre offices, presumably to reduce costs to the university.

The SPP is a book given to students at the beginning of their academic year, in which they are expected to record the courses they will be studying, to give an account of the learning resources they consulted, to describe the challenges they faced, and what measures they took to resolve these difficulties. The SPP is an important tool in enabling students to sit their final examinations, since it is only once it has been assessed by the tutor during the face-to-face sessions that the student is permitted to progress to the final exam.

The first day of my participation started with the opening session of the morning. This was a presentation on the effective ways of tackling tests and examination questions by one of the tutors from the headquarters. The afternoon session was spent in demonstrating how to fill in the SPP book. The tutor also discussed the different ways of searching for materials through the use of the Internet.

The next day was spent in the assessment and signing of the SPP books. The session was not particularly engaging as students were meeting with tutors in a series of separate rooms. The tutors assessed the readiness of students to sit the annual examination and, if satisfied, they then signed the SPP. However, the students' academic problems stated in the SPP were left unresolved, although students were allowed to sit the examination. The success of an exercise such as this really depends on how students' access to learning resources and tutor support can be improved. Unfortunately these requirements are inadequately addressed at present by the OUT. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

Practical Sessions

The third mode of face-to-face teaching was performed during practical sessions. Students said:

We are required to go to regional centre B for teaching practice. I have heard it is also done at district level, but I think this is done in a few selected districts (Lambertha).

We also do teaching practice, but we have to go to the town region for assessment (Catherine).

The Open University has very specific centres for all the students who do science practical. So I always travel from to St John University in Dodoma (David).

I have actually done my practical work at Sokoine University in Morogoro (Sebalela).

The students' responses show that they participate in teaching practice and in practical science sessions. They also indicate that these activities take place in urban areas that are at a distance from their homes. In spite of the challenge of distance among respondents, they enjoyed and valued these practical training opportunities as they helped to broaden and strengthen their competence and skills. For example one of them said:

The teaching practice is vital for beefing up work skills. When I am doing my teaching practice I feel like I am a professional teacher; I become more effective (Alex).

The teaching practice and practical sessions are particularly important as they enable students to obtain constructive feedback from their tutors and lab technicians. Hands-on practice, therefore, might be regarded as a good way of teaching and equipping students with the essential skills they require.

Printed Study Materials

The OUT uses printed study materials as a source of self-teaching among students. Participants said:

We are provided with study materials and they advise us how to find reference books (Alex).

We normally provide study materials to our students (Director-Regional Centre D).

Students are provided with study materials and once they face difficulties they consult us (Tutor A).

It became clear in my study that students treated the printed study materials as their main source of learning. This may be associated with the inadequacies they face in accessing other learning resources and tutor support in the rural context. For example, students said:

I use study materials for learning as there are no teachers around (Sebalela).

*I just use study materials for learning. You know if you carefully use study materials you are likely to do well in your examinations (**Lambertha**).*

*Study materials are my big source of learning (**Allen**).*

*It is true that I depend very much on the study materials which are provided by the OUT for learning (**Alpha**).*

*I depend very much on study materials provided by the OUT, but I sometimes go to the regional library to look for books (**Jonathan**).*

There was unquestionably an overdependence on this type of material among the students I spoke to: other learning and teaching strategies such as face-to-face sessions and ICT were less accessible to rural students because of poor infrastructure and the distance involved in accessing resources.

This overdependence on the printed study materials seems likely to limit students' capacity to develop critical commentary skills and broader intellectual abilities, perhaps encourage the use of rote-learning approaches to pass examinations and a generally shallow approach to learning, which is the opposite of what a university should aspire to (Landbeck and Mugler, 2000; Thrope, 2003).

I discussed this issue of over-dependency on study materials with OUT administrators. This is what they said:

*We are providing students with study materials and course outlines, but we also advise them to look for more books and search for more materials in the Internet. The main purpose is to assist students to broaden their knowledge (**Director Regional Centre D**).*

*Actually, we are providing them with study materials. We always tell them that study materials are like outlines and that they have to supplement them with other resources like library and Internet services. We encourage them to have group discussions and borrow books from friends (**Top Official –Rank A**).*

These responses indicate that the printed study materials provided should be supplemented by other resources in physical and digital form which, as we know, are not always accessible to these rural students.

Observation of the Available Printed Study Materials

I managed to observe the stock of study materials located in regional centres B and D, and looked at a few of the printed materials, such as OED 202 (Educational media and technology), OED 213 (Educational planning and administration) and OED 306 (Adult education and national development). I noted that they were written in dialogical and student-friendly terms to allow self-teaching by individual students. The style of writing in which the materials were produced was that of didactic conversation, as pioneered by Holmberg (1983), who said that this particular style facilitated the active engagement of students in reading.

However, despite the provision of these printed study materials, university students also require much more ready access to library books and other online learning materials. The photographs below show the study material rooms in regions B and D, where students accessed the resources available for their chosen courses in that particular year.

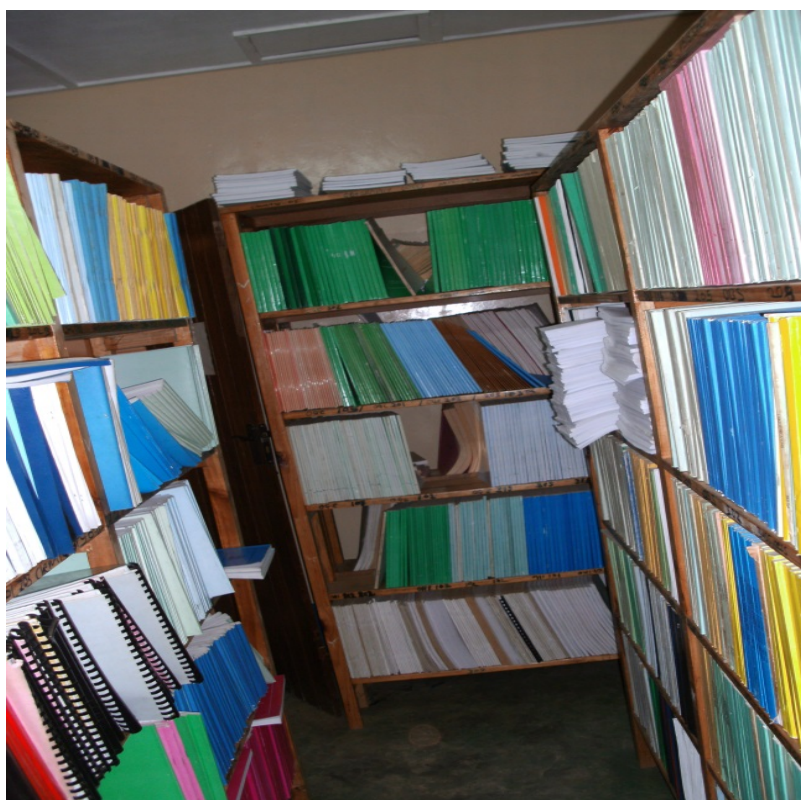


Figure 8: Study material room in regional centre B



Figure 9: Study material room in regional centre D

The rooms in the photographs above are storage areas where all copies of printed materials for students are kept. The printed study materials appear to be arranged according to particular courses. The shelves in figure 8 appear overstocked, while the shelves in figure 9 have empty spaces. It might have been the case that the shelves in figure 8 had been newly stocked, while those in figure 9 may have been in the process of being distributed to students. In addition, the storage rooms appear to be too small to accommodate all the materials, as some have been squeezed in, and others placed on the floor.

5.4.2 Modes of Communication

My discussion with students revealed that the modes adopted for general communication purposes by the OUT were not very different from the teaching modes. The University used media such as email, mobile phones, letters, radio, display boards and the OUT website for communication purposes. They also use face-to-face contact, either through the appointed contact person at the district level

or by allowing students to visit regional centres. The communication took place between students, tutors and regional directors.

Participants reported as follows:

I go to have face-to-face discussions with the regional director at the regional centre (Ezekiel).

The OUT has selected a contact person from the regional centre and district level. In case of any information, they are the ones informing other students around them (Jonathan).

Some of the students come to the regional centre and see us on a face-to-face basis. Sometimes we use text messages and students' leaders in the district (Director, Region A).

We use mobile phones to communicate with tutors who are at the regional centres, for it is impossible to go to town every now and then (Allen).

We also use radio. We communicate with students whenever we want to inform them about changes or any other information forwarded to us from the headquarters. (Director, Region B).

Yes, I do communicate with my students very frequently through mobile phones. They call me when they want to know if there are changes in the timetable, or in the arrival of study materials. (Tutor/Director, Region C).

We also meet with teachers during examinations. We communicate with tutors through phones and they help us if they have time (Shabani).

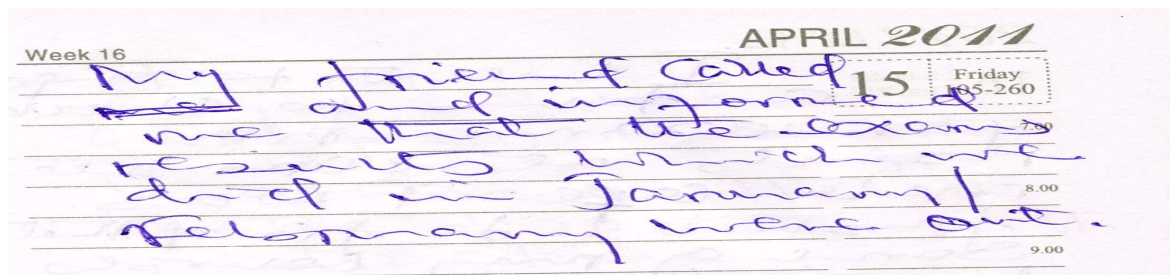
We sometimes use mobile phones. I think most of our students have mobile phones. We make calls or send text messages for the urgent announcements (Tutor, B).

I wrote a letter to the OUT headquarters and they responded immediately (Wilson).

Most of the information I need appears on the Internet, I mean the OUT website (Daniel).

We sometimes send letters in case we have something to inform them about, but this is very rare (Director, Region A).

One of the students also documented the following in his diary.



"My friend called and informed me about examination results which we did in January/February."

The OUT also utilised display boards to deliver information to its students, as seen below in Figure 10 and 11.



Figure 10: Display board in Regional Centre C



Figure 11: Display board at the Headquarters

The above photographs display information posted at the regional centres and at the OUT headquarters. The posts include information on fees payment, examination timetables, circulars on the use of online resources, field work allocations, new enrollees and registration dates for examinations.

From the comments made by the students above and from the information in the diaries and display boards it is clear that the OUT utilises every possible means to ensure that students access relevant information. The sources of communication adopted in the academic field, therefore, appear compatible with the modes of communication used in distance education (Keegan, 1996; Moore and Kearsley, 1996, 2005, 2012; Bates, 2005; Sharma, 2011).

However, the use of radio, letters and mobile phones seem more compatible with the country's current rural infrastructure, while modes such as face-to-face sessions, web-based information and display boards may seem irrelevant as students have to travel long distances from their rural locations to town just to access information in the regional centres, and access to ICT is often limited.

The students' comments above also reveal that interaction through media was basically about administrative matters and had less to do with course content. This may be because of the students' poor access to communication and the extra costs they incur. For example, my observations in this study show that the computer labs established at regional centres A and D were not connected to Internet services, while regional centres B and C did not even have computer labs. The photographs below show computer rooms in Regional Centres A and D.



Figure 12 Computer room in regional centre D



Figure 13: Computer room in regional centre A

The computers displayed in the photographs above seem to be new in appearance as some are still in their plastic covers. The presence of computers at regional centres perhaps demonstrates an intention to enable academic interaction between students and their tutors. However, this will only be realised when all of these computers are linked to Internet services.

The use of radio hinted by the participants above also looks to be an appropriate tool in delivering information to students. Discussion with regional directors described how radio was used at the OUT. For example:

We use radio for announcing applications or dates for graduation ceremonies (Director, Region C).

Yes, we also use radio for communication. We communicate with students, especially when we want to inform them about changes of timetable, or when we have any other information forwarded to us from the headquarters (Director, Region B).

This usage is different from universities like the Indira Ghandi National Open University (IGNOU) which uses radio for tutoring and counselling purposes (Sukumar, 2001; Chandar and Sharma, 2003). Indeed, counselling sessions through the use of radio proved to be very effective at IGNOU as it provided opportunities for remote rural students to ask questions, share their challenges and receive advice on how to deal with their own particular difficulties (Sukumar, 2001). However, the benefits associated with the use of radios at IGNOU could be equally important in Tanzania, given the location of students and the relevancy of providing support for their academic needs.

5.5 Students' Learning Environments in the Academic, Rural, and Domestic Fields

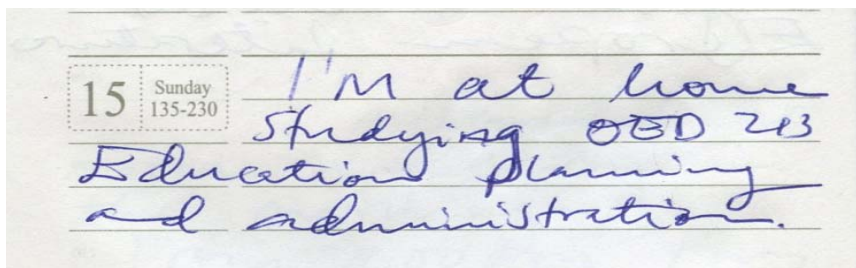
5.5.1 Space for Students' Learning

Studying among rural students took place mainly in their domestic contexts. Students commented as follows:

I sometimes study for one hour in the office or at home in the evening (Wilson).

I always study at home after work (Catherine).

I study at home after working hours from 4pm until 6pm. I go and read under a tree near my house (David).



"I am at home studying OED 213 (Educational Planning and Administration)."

Students also study in public spaces and in offices. For example:

I do my work very well to please my employer, and in between working hours I sneak to the district library and study for at least two hours during lunch time and come back (Zainab).

I sufficiently use my time between my teaching periods for learning purposes (Koletha).

Yes, I do study here in my office when people are gone (Amelia).

The findings above indicate that students study at work, especially after working hours. However, a few do say that they find time to study during working hours. The findings, therefore, run in tandem with other findings in distance education suggesting students assume learning activities at home, in offices or at other locations of their choice (Holmberg, 1989; Moore and Kearsley, 1996, 2005; Philip, 2003). However, studying at home after working hours is also not ideal as tiredness can affect students' level of concentration.

5.5.2 Time for Learning

I interviewed students on the time they spent studying. Here are a few responses:

During weekends, I study for three or four hours. That could be at home or in the office (Samwel).

I can study after work from 3.30pm to 6pm (Amelia).

I spare two or three hours a day for studying over the weekend (Christian).

The findings from the students above show that the time spent on learning was negligible when compared to the time spent on work and other commitments. For example, students demonstrate that they study for two to four hours during week days, or over the weekend. Their studies also took place during the evening and early morning hours. For instance students said:

I take time to read at night, from eight to ten p.m. and I also wake up at five and read until morning. I always have to wait until everyone is asleep (David).

My study time is at night. I sleep when I get home and wake up around 3am to study (Lambertha).

I do my studies during the evening hours from 05:00pm till 11:00pm. Similarly in the morning, I read from 5:00am for at least one hour, then I prepare for work (Allen).

Therefore, students used all the opportunities to study that were available to them. Studying during the evening and in the early hours of the morning demonstrates the voluntary nature of the undertaking, and illustrates just how strong the commitment of students is to their studies.

5.5.3 Home Learning Environment

Since study mostly took place in the domestic field, I was curious to explore the nature of the students' learning environment. The students' homes I observed varied in their construction from cement block, clay brick (fired), to cement plastered mud houses. The roofs varied from grass (thatched), and iron sheets, to locally made mud tiles. The homes had either two or three bedrooms.

A very few homes had electricity from either the national grid, or through the use of solar power. The majority used candle light and kerosene lamps. Only one student had a generator. For example, students said:

I do not have electricity at home. I use a kerosene lamp for studying (David).

I do my study by using a kerosene lamp (Adolf).

We have electricity; we are getting it from the mission centre (Wilson).

I sometimes use solar, though the panels are too small. And in case it is out of charge I use a kerosene lamp (Jonathan).

Students also used sitting rooms and bedrooms as a study space in the domestic field:

*I have a specific table for studying in my sitting room. My children and relatives do make use of that table too (**Bakari**).*

*I normally use my room for studying. I have a table and a chair. And once I am tired I go to bed (**Alex**).*

*I use both the sitting room and bedroom for studying (**Wilson**).*

The learning environments of the students seem to be very challenging as most of them had no access to electricity. Having to study by the light of a kerosene lamp, lantern, or candle is not ideal, and it is also expensive. Study also appeared to take place in the living room and bedroom, and as these spaces were often shared among immediate family members and visitors, privacy and quiet for focused study were often hard to achieve. Nevertheless, students remained enthusiastic and motivated to complete their degrees and attain their goals. The photographs below present some of the students' homes and learning spaces.



Figure 14: A student's home in a purely rural setting



Figure 15: The neighbouring home of a student



Figure 16: A student's home with a study room in a rural district



Figure 17: A student's home in a rural district with electricity

The houses in Figures 16 and 17 above were located close to district centres. The students who lived there could study during the evening because they had electricity, unlike the learning environments in Figures 14 and 15 which show distinctly rural locations, far removed from the infrastructure of modern electricity, roads, and telecommunication lines.

Figure 15, for instance, shows the neighbouring home of one of the students. The student's neighbour is involved with farming and livestock keeping, which was a common occupation in this particular village. Moreover, the general surroundings observed in Figures 14 and 15 suggest an aura of poverty which is a typical feature of developing country (Khan, 2001; Avila and Gasperini, 2005; Ravillion et al, 2007; Tacoli, 2008; Aikaeli, 2010). However, the study room portrayed in Figure 16, on the other hand, would be an asset to any student.

Figure 18 below presents a student's sitting room, which is also used as study room. The second and third levels of the shelves situated in the corner contain reading materials (study materials provided by the OUT, as well as photocopied pages). The upper part contains books on teaching as the student was a primary school teacher. The sheet of paper glued on to the shelf upright is a study timetable, suggesting that this student was well-organised.



Figure 18: A student's sitting room in a rural setting

5.6 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has discussed students' experiences of teaching and learning within the OUT, using the broad perspective of 'habitus' as drawn from Bourdieu in order to understand students' positioning within the academic field of the OUT. In this conclusion I will attempt to further apply Bourdieu's analytic lens to my findings. I do this in order to summarise how this part of my research contributes to our understanding of support and learning as they are explained by this student group.

'Conventional' vs 'mixed' habitus

One surprising finding relates to what I have described as the 'conventional' and 'mixed' habitus of students regarding their prior educational experiences. I found that students whose habitus had been partially structured within a 'conventional' academic field of full-time, face-to-face education, experienced difficulties in studying at the OUT with its very different systems and approaches. Since these students' prior experiences and educational habitus had been informed by the

conventional mode, they found it difficult to adapt to new modes and methods of learning.

Grenfell and James (1998) argue that agents are expected to come to the field with a certain amount of capital. In the case of these students the kind of capital they had accumulated in what we would think of as more prestigious educational modes (face-to-face and conventional education) and did not appear to transfer well to the distance mode. Students with a habitus structured by the less privileged 'mixed' modes of learning however appeared to have accumulated the necessary cultural and social capital to enable them to position themselves advantageously in the academic field of the OUT.

Additionally, an educational habitus structured by evening study programmes, private tuition and diploma studies all appeared to allow students to learn better independently and plan their study time within the new academic field. However, the capital (social and cultural) accumulated by both groups of students, regardless of their previous educational experiences, was not great enough to allow them to sustain their learning in the academic field without additional support.

Teaching and Mobility

The various teaching strategies employed at the OUT, such as the use of ICT, face-to-face sessions and the use of printed self-study materials, were designed to enable students to study in their own localities. However, these methods appeared to insufficiently support students because of technological and location difficulties. It seems that the education of these rural students was severely limited by the lack of active teaching available to them.

As one example, students are supposed to be able to drop in at their regional centres in order to receive support from their tutors. However, students who lived far away from the regional centres usually had a long way to travel and some had to sleep in town – an expensive option for these students. Therefore, the access to tutor support was inadequate and was further constrained by the students' own limited economic

capital. This, in turn, hindered their ability to accumulate the academic capital they desired through their enrolment at the OUT.

The use of technology was another real problem as the study showed that there was a shortage of Internet services at the regional centres, as well as in remote rural areas. This meant that students had to rely on the one source of teaching that was accessible to them, namely printed study materials. Students were thus in a position where they needed to study and understand those topics from a single source (printed study materials) without the guidance of tutors.

The availability of these printed self-taught study materials as the only learning resource caused students to become over-dependent on them. If we expect university students to read widely in order to develop intellectual and critical skills (Barnett, 1992, 2011; Collini, 2012), then we must put in place good, deliverable teaching strategies, adequate contact with tutors and colleagues and access to online materials and suitable library resources (Tait, 2000; Lentell, 2003; Ukpo, 2006; Sharma, 2011; Lephalala and Makoe, 2012).

Central to the discussion in this section is the structuring of teaching processes that can support the shifts in students' habitus that are necessary for them to achieve mobility between the 'worlds' of the domestic and academic fields. This study argues that such mobility is limited at present by the inadequate teaching practices that are employed in the academic field of the OUT. Therefore, provision of better academic support services would be a significant factor in helping students to adapt their habitus so that they can succeed within the rules and conditions of the academic field.

Motives for Study

The habitus of students informs their motives in pursuing a university education. In this study, students revealed both economic motives (changing jobs, promotion, retirement benefits, skills improvement and salary increments) and personal motives (prestige, change of status, and recognition) as being behind their quest for the cultural capital attainable through higher education. The habitus of these rural

students is often characterised by a background of poverty and lack of educational attainment within the wider family. It is the transformation of their status, and their move away from poverty and the lack of education which often drives these students to invest in the attainment of academic capital. It is also argued that education is among the tools necessary to access cultural capital (knowledge and certificates) (Bourdieu, 1990). However, if the motive to access cultural capital (which is embodied as knowledge in individuals through educational encounters) is to be sustained, students need to have access to appropriate teaching and learning methods that are focused on supporting them to successfully complete their studies.

In the next chapter I present the problems students face across the domestic and academic fields, and discuss the coping strategies they used to address these.

6 Chapter Six: The Challenges and Coping Strategies of Rural Students at the Open University of Tanzania: Tales from the Fields

6.1 Introduction

In Chapter Five, I discussed the teaching and learning practices undertaken by students at the OUT. I also discussed students' habitus and the influence of this on their current studies. This chapter discusses the challenges facing rural students and the coping strategies they employ when studying at the OUT. My research is influenced by the argument that people from the same environments share a similar habitus (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990). Thus, my study concentrated on students who were living in rural locations whose engagement in studies at the OUT enabled me to explore their schemes of thought, actions and feelings, which I describe here as challenges and coping strategies.

The chapter consists of four sections. The first section introduces the chapter while the second describes the challenges experienced by rural students when conducting their studies. The third part discusses the coping strategies which students adopt while trying to maintain their positions as agents in the academic field of the OUT. The final section presents a summary and conclusion.

6.2 Challenges Across the Academic, Domestic and Rural Fields

The discussion in this section focuses on findings from field observations, interviews and documented information from diaries, and begins with a presentation and discussion of the challenges experienced by students.

6.2.1 Challenges in the Academic Field

My findings reveal that students experienced difficulties in accessing relevant support in the academic field. Such support is critical in facilitating teaching and learning.

Inadequate Access to Tutor Support and Physical Resources

Inadequate Access to Tutor Support

Regarding the lack of tutor support the students made the following comments:

I have not seen a teacher since I started in 2008. I only meet with the Regional Director (Ezekiel).

There is one tutor for science and one for Arts subjects. But they are less helpful to us law students (Christian).

Tutors are not available at the regional centre. Even worse, we lack tutors in areas of our specialization (Alex).

Another challenge is that we meet rarely with our lecturers in the centres, and those of us who stay in the remote areas have no opportunity to discuss with them (Catherine).

No big support from the regional centre! Maybe just general advice on how to study as I don't have teachers in my subjects! (Koletha)

The faculty of Law does not have teachers in the regional centres, except perhaps in Dar es Salaam. This is a big snag for us (Alpha).

There are three problems highlighted by these students. For some, there are no tutors at the regional centres. For others, some tutors are available, but are of little practical use as their areas of specialization differ from those of their students. And for others again, some tutors are available but are not accessible due to the fact that they live far away from students' homes. These three scenarios certainly limit students' access to academic support from their tutors. There is a real danger, therefore, that the education of students will be severely affected by the absence of proper academic support.

My interviews with tutors also confirmed the inadequacy of tutors according to areas of specialization. For example, tutors reported:

I specialized in biology, but I cannot claim to know everything in science subjects. What I am doing is to direct students on the relevant books to read (Tutor 4).

I did business management at undergraduate level but in here I guide up to Master's student level. And you can't say that is not your job as students are waiting for your

support. Apart from that we have so much work to do. I am doing both academic and administrative roles. I don't have time for my personal academic growth (Tutor 2).

The tone of comment from Tutor 2 above indicates the sense of concern and feeling of being overburdened in assuming roles as a tutor and an administrator. It would appear that tutors are required to guide students at different levels of education, including at Master's level. This is clearly unsatisfactory as some of these tutors do not have a Master's degree themselves. Moreover, tutors are required to guide students in their areas of specialization. However, tutors' specializations are concentrated in a particular area or field and thus they are unable to offer academic advice beyond this field. For example, tutor four above was supposed to help science students in the fields of physics, chemistry and biology, even though he only specialised in biology. Such situations force tutors out of their specialism zones and must affect their efficiency in helping students to achieve their goals.

Moreover, my discussion with tutors and regional directors disclosed their educational qualifications and areas of specialization which are presented in the table below.

Regional Centre	Personnel	Qualification	Tutors'/ Regional Directors' Areas of Specialization
Regional Centre A	Tutor 1	First Degree	Education
	Tutor 2	Master's Degree	Business Management
	Regional Director	Master's Degree (Currently a PhD Student)	English Language
Regional Centre B	Tutor 1	First Degree	Business Management
	Regional Director	PhD	Education
Regional Centre C	Regional Director	Master's Degree	Finance and Management
Regional Centre D	Tutor 1	First degree	Arts
	Tutor 2	First Degree	Zoology-Science
	Regional Director	PhD	Economics

Table 11: Tutors' and Regional directors' educational qualifications and areas of specialization

Table 11 above confirms students' comments on the inadequate number of tutors and their subject areas of specialization. For example, only a few tutors in the regional centres had a degree, while those who had a PhD were regional directors who mainly dealt with administrative matters. However, during my fieldwork I discovered that three tutors from the sampled regional centres were pursuing a Master's degree qualification. While this will undoubtedly improve their competence, it will not reduce the problem of the lack of tutors and their limited areas of specialization.

The work of tutors is central to the development of students as they are expected to assist students in their academic areas of study (Beaudoin, 1990; Stevenson et al 1996; Lentell, 2003; Mishra, 2005). The effective performance of these roles requires that tutors should have a high level of competence in their specialised area and should be knowledgeable in the conduct of distance education as it differs greatly from the conventional system of education.

Inadequate Access to Physical Resources

Students commented as follows on the availability of physical resources:

A library at the regional centre (laugh)! We often come this way if we have our own study materials. There is only a shelf with very few books (Neema).

I have been looking for a book called “Mashetani”. It is nowhere to be found. I entered the examination without reading the book (Bakari).

I used the library at the regional centre when I was in my first year. I accessed books on contract law, but now I am buying the books as there is nothing for my course (Daniel).

We don’t have enough space for studying at the regional centre, especially during examinations time. This is a challenge to us with no permanent residence in town (Alex).

The study materials are not enough. For example, most of the science materials are not available in our regional centre (Abel).

I missed a course on the principles of guidance and counselling, and history methods. I was told they brought only a few copies and were finished (Alex).

Study materials are our main need. They should be provided on time (Daniel).

Another thing is that study materials are not enough for all the students. It is only those near the centre who get them first. I confess that I have never experienced problems like now in my third year. I have not received a single copy of study materials, and there are no reference books to guide my studies (Lambertha).

I had problems in accessing materials in political science. I got very few materials though I had the course outline (Wilson).

The responses above indicate the various struggles that students face in accessing books from libraries, in gaining adequate access to learning spaces and in accessing printed study materials. The issue of printed study materials seems to be largely an

administrative one, since students complain mainly about the shortage of these, and of the delays in acquiring them. Such problems were also confirmed by one of the top officials, who said:

“Our students have the right to complain for it is true that they are not getting enough study materials. Since my arrival here in this office, there is no time when students have received the study materials on time; it is only this year that we managed somehow” (Top official-Rank 4).

The preparation and distribution of study materials in digital and print form is part of the course development support service that is provided in distance education, and their availability is essential to students’ eventual academic success (Holmberg, 1989; Keegan, 1996; Kamau, 2001). However, the inadequate access to library resources, as stated by the students above, could adversely affect students’ intellectual development and the breadth of knowledge they are able to attain.

Inflexible Practices and Poor Access to ICT

Interviews with students revealed that they experienced challenges in relation to inflexible practices at the OUT, and were also hindered by poor ICT.

Inflexible Practices

If you miss a session of teaching practice then you will have to wait until the following year (Catherine).

There should be some flexibility in the conduct of examinations and tests. If you miss this time, then you should have access to the next session, and not be waiting for the whole year. For example, we do tests in February and final examinations in June. Is this a primary school? (Daniel).

I think the OUT could facilitate the giving of certificates immediately upon completion of the courses. I see no reason why graduation ceremonies should be held once a year. It might make sense for conventional systems. But with the OUT, flexibility is very important (David).

These students’ responses suggest that the academic field is not flexible enough in allowing students to study at their own time and space. The lapse of time between one scheduled event to another is too lengthy as, for example, when students have to wait for up to a year to sit missed or postponed examinations, or to attend a graduation ceremony. Such occurrences are clearly not what students expected when

they first began their courses of study. This relates to the value students place on flexibility, which is highlighted in section 5.3.1 of Chapter Five.

Poor Access to ICT

As discussed in Chapter Five, section 5.4.1, the OUT uses ICT in teaching and learning practices. My study indicates that there was little done in terms of preparation regarding the use of ICT for teaching and communication purposes. This made it difficult for students to access the services:

Communication between me and my regional centre is not smooth, especially the one which requires Internet facilities (Wilson).

At the regional centre there is no Internet so we pay for it at an Internet café. There is also a problem of inefficiency of the network (Samwel).

We have been forced to get into technology which is not readily accessible to us in the remote areas. It is more complicated since every bit of information has to be traced in the Internet i.e. registration, examination forms, examination results, examination timetable, name anything! That is tough! Even at the regional centre, no Internet, we end up paying in Internet cafes in town (David).

The students' comments above relate to poor access to technological devices which limit their ability to communicate. This may be contrary to the current effort by the OUT which requires students to access online services for administrative and academic matters. The introduction of ICT without sufficient infrastructural preparation in the regional centres seems to be a particular challenge to rural students. Indeed, it is clear that success in communication and interaction between students and their university is dependent on technological development in the regional centres and within students' locations.

Expenses and Other Hidden Costs of Education

Interview sessions revealed the following regarding costs and expenses incurred by students:

The OUT is very expensive. You need to buy reading materials, pay for Internet facilities, travelling costs and accommodation (Bakari).

I think the OUT should know that the cost of education affects us a lot. We have to travel, photocopy materials, buy books, live in town and pay for our fees (Alex).

When I go to do my examinations, I have to be there for three weeks in a guest house. I eat in a hotel and incur other expenses (Allen).

Apart from tuition fees there are many hidden costs like transport, photocopying and accommodation (Lambertha).

I always travel from regional centre B to Dodoma, St John University to do science practical (David).

The cost of education is high in the sense that as a student I have to pay the tuition fees from my own pocket. The salary I am getting is not enough to foot all the bills and other associated costs (James).

For these students, distance education is hardly cost effective (Rumble, 1997; Daniel, 2007; Krishnan, 2012). Similar issues about the incurred private costs of education have also been raised by studies in Indonesia (Belawati, 2006; Rye and Zubaidah, 2008), Zimbabwe (Kangai and Bukaliya, 2011) and Nigeria (Olakulehin and Panda, 2011).

The high costs of education, as my participants revealed, focus mainly on the issues of accommodation and transport. These issues probably differentiate the experiences of rural students in Tanzania from students in other countries. Indeed, we rarely think of accommodation costs in terms of distance education due to the nature of the distance education in most of its forms. Distance education is expected to follow students in their locations, whether physically or digitally (Keegan, 1996, 2000). However, this does not occur in Tanzania, leaving rural students with no option other than to travel from their own area in search of support.

6.2.2 Challenges in the Rural Field

The following sub-sections discuss the challenges experienced by students in the rural field.

Little Time for Studies and Many Responsibilities

Students who had other cultural, community and employment responsibilities made the following comments:

*I am a field person and when I come back home I have to write reports. At the same time I have to study (**Amelia**).*

*I have many responsibilities. I am the head teacher. So I have to manage teachers and other members of staff apart from the students. I am always the last one to go home (**Wilson**).*

*But we are too busy with work, to the extent that there is little time for study (**Lambertha**).*

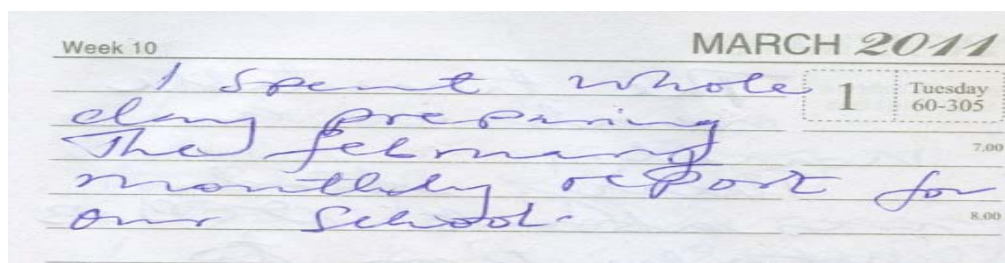
*You know it is hard to separate yourself from the community. For example, you have to participate in weddings and burial ceremonies (**Alex**).*

*We work together and help each other in times of bereavement and weddings. We also have to contribute money, food and firewood (**Adolf**).*

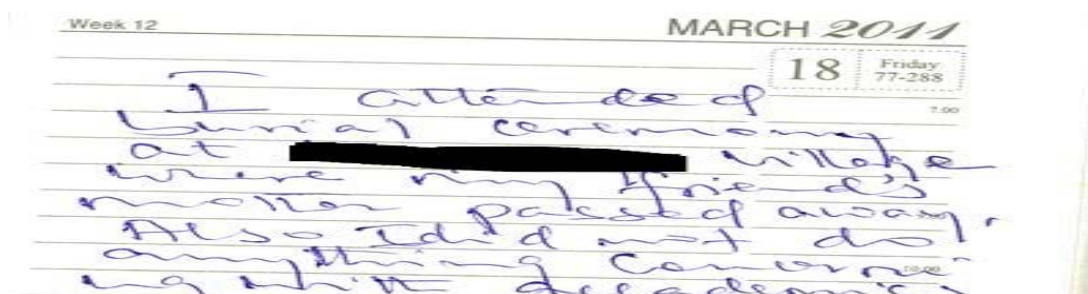
*We are supposed to participate in all the community activities which take place in our area. For example, we have to make fire bricks for the construction of a ward office. We also contribute in the construction of secondary and primary schools (**Magnus**).*

*We have traditional practices and you cannot avoid participating. Let me tell you in brief. Usually inculture we have initiation and circumcision ceremonies. We normally make it a big ceremony, and people are invited to celebrate (**Bakari**).*

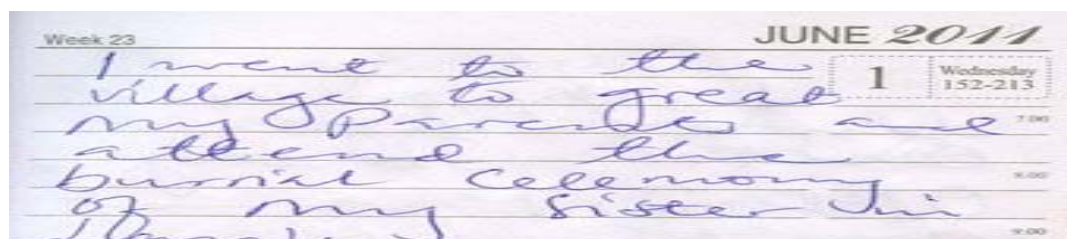
Similar findings were also noted in the students' diaries that I collected, some of which are presented below.



"I spent the whole day preparing the February monthly report for our school."



"I attended a burial ceremony atvillage where my friend's mother passed away. Also I did not do anything concerning my academics."



"I went to the village to greet my parents and attend the burial ceremony of my sister in-law."

The documented diaries above indicate that students are involved in office and communal responsibilities which are difficult to avoid. Obviously, these activities will consume the time that students set aside for study. My discussion with other students indicates that they were also involved in village meetings, in the construction of schools, communal guarding, and at weddings and burial ceremonies. Students often have to participate in community and cultural matters in person, while also providing material and financial support. Such aspects of rural community life are quite common place, but would be rare occurrences in urban areas.

I asked if students' engagement in community and cultural life interfered with their academic endeavours. The responses were as follows:

*When you are in a community they expect you to be participative. You have to reschedule your reading time as activities could take place up to midnight (**David**).*

*I agree that one of my challenges is managing all these activities. They greatly interfere with my studies (**Ezekiel**).*

*There is no way you could think of avoiding the burial ceremony. So you would have to stop studying and attend the burial ceremony (**Koletha**).*

*Well, it is quite disturbing for you might have planned to study, and all of a sudden you get an invitation. You cannot refuse it! (**Neema**)*

The voices of these students show that interference from community and cultural activities has an effect on their study schedules. Some had to reschedule their study time, while others had to stop studying. Sharing and interacting at community and village level helps to maintain unity and develops the communal side of life.

Nevertheless, these activities do appear to restrict the time that students require to study.

Research indicates that part-time students are occupied with socio-economic activities that threaten their commitment to study (Holmberg, 1989). Therefore, it is suggested that students should be provided with the study skills, time management skills and access to guidance and counselling they require in order to manage their studies (Reid, 1995; Simpson, 2000; Tait, 2000). Such actions might also help students to deal more successfully with the multiple responsibilities they face in their working places and communities.

Poor Infrastructure and Deprived Learning Environment

Interview sessions and observation revealed that students' studies took place in a poor rural environment that had neither libraries nor tutor support. The students' environment was also challenged by a poor infrastructure with inadequate access to roads, electricity and Internet use.

*I have to travel 120 km to access Internet services in the region. Worse, one may go just to find the facility is not working (**Wilson**).*

*The transport to town can be a nightmare for the roads are very bad. One can easily miss transport to go to town due to the challenges in the transport system (**Jonathan**).*

*There is a lack of electricity which forces us to use a Kerosene lamp or a candle (**Magnus**).*

*We sometimes miss important information provided during orientation sessions. This is also contributed to by the poor means of transport, as during the rainy seasons the roads become impassable (**Zainab**).*

*Aah, if you observe carefully, many activities at the OUT are done electronically. This is a very serious challenge to us. Internet services are available, yes, but they are not accessible in our locations. I have to go to town to access the Internet (**Alpha**).*

*Things are different here; you find no library, no teacher, no Internet, and you are also isolated (**Christian**).*

*Our environment is also not conducive at all. But we are learning the hard way (**Amelia**).*

The students' comments above describe the severe infrastructural challenges they face in their areas. They talk of the inadequate provision of transport and of poor roads. Similar challenges were also observed during my field work. The photos below are examples of the poor roads encountered during the rainy season.



Figure 19: Examples of roads in a rural environment

The roads shown above have no tarmac, and are slippery in the aftermath of heavy rainfall. They hinder accessibility to urban areas, which Zainab, above, says affects her attendance at the scheduled events in the regional centre.

Amelia, above, summarised the whole experience as an ‘unsuitable learning environment’. Expecting students to prosper and to attain high standards of performance in such an environment is perhaps unreasonable. The poor infrastructure observed requires government intervention in terms of rural development planning.

Distance, Loneliness and Isolation

Students had these comments to make in relation to distance, loneliness and isolation:

I am very isolated. If I have a question or any burning issue in academics I will have to wait until I meet with the Regional Director or tutors during a face-to-face session (David).

Once I am stuck academically I have nowhere to run for assistance..... the regional centre is located very far from here (Alpha).

I think the worst I can say is that I am in the rural area and I feel the importance of communicating with my teachers, but I cannot. I cannot even get the information I need. I cannot even get any advice on what to read (Christian).

No interaction even among students themselves. You are all alone, no one to interact with. This is a big flaw in my studies (Adolf).

I don't communicate with my fellow students, it is impossible – I am all alone (Catherine).

Okay, the first is lack of support because I am all alone here. I cannot interact with others (David).

The main challenge is on distance (Zainab).

We cannot help each other as we are far apart (Magnus).

It takes almost four hours to come to the regional centre. It is too far (Allen).

Distance is an impediment to our communication. It is a pity for us who stay far away from the regional centre (Catherine).

The statements above demonstrate the students' strong sense of isolation and loneliness and of how far away they are from their tutors and from their fellow students. These feelings are prompted by inadequate communication and interaction and by the lack of access to support services such as libraries, Internet services and academic interactions, all of which have been illustrated in previous sections of this study. The failure to interact and access academic support must surely be factors in contributing to the frustration and demoralization felt by students.

We know from the literature that good communication that enables students to access support from tutors and each other is essential to good quality education in the face of isolation and distance (Holmberg, 1989; Keegan, 1993; Gatsha, 2008; Mbukusa, 2009; Ramos et al, 2011).

Poverty and Financial Problems

Another problem which surfaced during my interview sessions with students in the rural field was that of financial problems and poverty.

I have financial problems which sometimes deter me from accessing learning resources. I know those under the conventional system, they get loans, but we don't. We mostly depend on our salaries (Zainab).

Similarly, poverty is a serious challenge. You get little income which may not carry you anywhere and at the same time you have so many responsibilities! (Jonathan).

There is nothing worse than poverty in the third world. I wish I could have enough money to buy a computer and modem. But poor as I am, I can't buy them! (Lambertha).

Sometimes you run short of finance and your employer does not support you either. It is another serious challenge (Shabani).

The comments above indicate that financial challenges seriously affect students' studies, as do the day-to-day problems they encounter in the rural field. For example, Zainab and Lambertha, above, associate their financial problems with their inability to access learning resources. Lambertha speaks directly of poverty. Others link their financial challenges to low salaries which make it difficult for them to manage their socio-economic responsibilities and also pay the costs of education.

The feelings about poverty expressed by students may also be associated with their location in the rural environment and with their family habitus, which was discussed in section 5.2.1 of Chapter Five. Moreover, students associated financial problems with the lack of access to loan support and support from employers. The issue of loans is an administrative matter that requires to be addressed by the OUT and the government. In principle, all university students in Tanzania are entitled to apply for loan support from the Higher Education Students' Loan Board (HESLB). The role of universities such as the OUT is to enable students to access loan forms and verify their studentship as all other matters are processed by the HESLB.

My discussions with regional directors and the OUT's top officials revealed that there were delays in filling in loan forms among rural students, which led to failures in meeting deadlines for submission to the HESLB. However, some of the students refuted these comments, saying they had observed the correct procedures but had not been granted a loan. One of the regional directors reported that only two students from his Centre were granted a loan from the loan board. It seems, therefore, that there may be a problem in accessing loans among distance students, a situation that might be associated with policy issues in the HESLB. Further research should be conducted in this area to find out why there is such limited access to loan support among distance students.

Students sampled in this study were employed in both private and public sectors, and were living in rural areas in Tanzania where the majority of the people are poor (Aikaeli, 2010). This made them more accountable to their immediate families and to significant others, and meant that they had to commit to communal and cultural activities. In previous sections I argued that students contribute items such as money, food and firewood to cultural and community events. In the same way, students were responsible for the daily upkeep of their families and relatives. (See more on this in the section 6.2.3 below). Such communal responsibilities may cause rural students to feel the effects of poverty as their salaries can never meet the costs of all expenses. In addition, the hidden costs of education, as discussed in section 6.2.1 above also add to students' financial concerns.

6.2.3 Challenges in the Domestic Field and Gendered Roles

Students' Roles and Responsibilities within their Families

This study was specifically interested in exploring students' gendered roles and the challenges they experience in the domestic field. Most of the discussion in the literature of distance education is centred on female students. However, this study explores the experiences of both male and female rural students in their home contexts. Students who enrolled at the OUT were also parents, husbands, wives, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters and some were even grandparents. Students commented as follows:

*I am married with four children and two grandchildren. I have the responsibility of taking care of them (**Bakari**).*

*I am not married but I have responsibilities. I have relatives who want my assistance (**Allen**).*

*My parents depend solely on me for their daily upkeep. I am the first born in my family and also the first to be employed (**Alex**).*

Students were expected to take care of their immediate family, as well as their extended family. This demonstrates how the communal ties of rural life work in that people are expected to shoulder communal responsibilities. Such actions can be associated with students' family habitus. The majority of students in this study grew up in rural areas and most probably saw their parents looking after their immediate families, and any significant others. The family roles assumed by students in the domestic field, therefore, might well be a limiting factor in the effective conduct of their studies, especially when their attention to study and family responsibilities has to be divided.

Gendered Roles

Discussions with students showed that there were differences in the gender roles assumed by male and female students. For example, female students said:

*When I go home I have to take care of my children and assist them in doing their school homework. I also have a toddler who needs more of my care. He wants me to play with him, and at the same time I have to plan for my studies (**Amelia**).*

*I also think of daily responsibilities in the family. I have to cook, to clean and take care of my children (**Koletha**).*

*My main role is to take care of the children. Much as I have to study, I need to train them to be responsible kids. I am obliged to take care of them, to feed them and give them good shelter (**Neema**).*

Male students commented as follows:

*My responsibility is to make sure that all important needs are taken care of and are available at home. Things like food, clothing, accommodation and the like. I always make sure that all the requirements are available the moment I get my salary (**Shabani**).*

*There are certain responsibilities which I have to fulfil in my family, like to ensure that they eat, dress and live comfortably (Big laugh) (**Alpha**).*

*I am studying and my children are also in schools. So I also have to pay for their fees as a father in the family (**Bakari**).*

*First of all I have to take care of my family by making sure that they have food for survival and also take care of their health (**James**).*

The responses indicate that female students were more involved with child upbringing and in assuming domestic roles, while male students were mainly concerned with economic responsibilities and the social comfort of their families. Such a practice demonstrates the African way of family life. Similar findings were also observed in other developing countries such as Malawi (Banda, 2004), Ghana (Kwamong, 2007; Mensa et al, 2008) and Zimbabwe (Gudhlanga et al, 2012).

My interviews with male students also indicated that a few of them were involved with some of the domestic chores. For example, they said:

*Being unmarried is yet another challenge for we have to cook for ourselves (**Magnus**).*

*My wife is a businesswoman. I cannot tell her to close the shop which supports us financially. I am forced to assist in some of the home chores (**Sebalela**).*

Although Magnus and Sebalela claim that they are also involved in carrying out domestic chores, it appears unlikely that this is their entire role. Their comments add support to the view that domestic roles are for women and not men. The men's

engagement with domestic labour runs counter to tradition. One of the female students seemed to hold a similar view:

‘Maybe it is possible that men are less concerned than us when it comes to family commitments. African men are only responsible for funding the family. But a mother is everything in the family. For example, I postponed my studies as I had a sick child to take care of. You know it is our role in the families. It is a tradition’ (Amelia).

Amelia, above, also emphasises the division of roles between men and women in communities. She seems to have internalized her expected role as a woman to the extent of postponing her studies in order to take care of her sick child. The differences in role structure may be associated with socio-cultural systems in the communities where there are hierarchies and priorities in the kind of roles to be performed in the household. The existence of gender roles among students may be influenced by their family habitus, which continues to guide their gendered roles in the management of household affairs.

However, the difference in gender roles does not mean that female students were not involved in financial matters. Two female students said:

Since the death of my husband, I have remained with great responsibilities. I am both a father and a mother (Lambertha).

I am a mother and I have children and my husband does not stay at home all the time. I have to take care of the family as well (Catherine).

Both of the students above seem to have assumed total responsibility for their families. However, I attribute this to particular circumstances, as Lambertha is a widow who had no choice but to shoulder the family’s socio-economic responsibilities, while Catherine lives at a distance from her husband. Responsibilities such as these are obviously a barrier to students’ learning as much of their time must inevitably be devoted to managing socio-economic matters within the family unit.

Child Bearing Role

Another angle on students’ involvement in family matters was demonstrated by female students who were engaged with motherhood and pregnancy.

Two female students commented:

I applied for the OUT in 2008 but I was pregnant. All the same, I continued with studies in a hard way as I had developed serious pressure (Amelia).

I am a female student and sometimes I do conceive, and so I have to stop teaching and postpone studies. It is a big challenge but I cannot avoid conceiving and having babies as it is part of my role as a wife (Koletha).

The two female students above share the experience of studying while pregnant. They both experienced problems with their physical health, which led to one continuing to study but with great difficulty, while the other decided to postpone her studies. Such cases suggest that female students should be considered differently from male students on certain matters related to support services. For example, it is suggested that adequate provision should be made for guidance and counselling; developing study skills; decentralising tutorials to district level; inviting one's spouse to attend orientation sessions; the use of information technology in learning; preparing policies to favour female students; and considering such women as adult students with experiences and varying needs (Mhehe, 2002; Kwapong, 2007; Mensa et al, 2008; Gudhlanga et al, 2012).

Shared Challenges in the Domestic Field

My interviews with students reveal that both male and female students experience difficulties in studying in the domestic field, regardless of the role differences described above. They reported:

I would say the main challenge is on financial responsibilities. Education is becoming too expensive. I am studying and my children are also in schools. So I also have to pay for their fees. It is very tough and I have other family requirements to attend to (Bakari).

It is costly; you have to leave money for the family, and at the same time I have to think of other expenses while I am gone to the regional centre to do examinations (Shabani).

You know with rural life, no one makes an appointment when coming to your house. You could be coming from work with the intention to study just to find that the whole clan is in your house. That is very challenging (David).

For example, I sometimes plan to read at home during weekends and I get interference from my children. Once they discover that I am at home they will be calling me and following me every time and everywhere. This affects my concentration and I can't ignore them. It is their right (Wilson).

Yes, for example I may get a message that my father is sick and that he has to be hospitalized. It is my role to go and take care of him. Sometimes this takes up to two weeks. It takes a lot of time (Shabani).

When I go home after work and think of studies, I find other commitments like family responsibilities. I find myself very uneasy (Zainab).

The comments above demonstrate that financial problems, family responsibilities, unplanned visitors and looking after the children are all factors that affect students' studies in the domestic field. For example, Bakari, as a father, experienced financial difficulties that required him to pay for his own education, as well as that of his children. Similarly, Shabani had to take two weeks away from his studies in order to be with his sick father in hospital, while David, above, complains about the unplanned visitors who descend on his house without invitation, an apparently normal occurrence in rural communities. Undoubtedly, such events are a challenge to students who would rather carry on with their studies than entertain guests. The challenges observed in this section illustrate the fact that both male and female students require support of one form or another in order to manage their gendered roles and social responsibilities.

Unsurprisingly, socio-cultural matters such as attending burial ceremonies, the unscheduled presence of unplanned visitors, and support by students of sick relatives and their immediate families are rarely discussed in the literature.

6.3 Coping Strategies in Fields

In section 6.2 above I presented a number of different challenges that hindered students' learning in the domestic, rural and academic fields. In this section, I will present the coping strategies adopted by rural students when managing those challenges.

6.3.1 Travelling to Town and Accessing Support

Travelling to town to access relevant support was one of the strategies discussed by students. They made the following comments:

*I travel to the regional centre and meet with the tutors (**James**).*

*I sometimes go to the regional library to look for books (**Jonathan**).*

*I sometimes board a bus to town just to try to get the study materials from the regional centre (**Magnus**).*

*When I go to town for library services, I have to stay for three or four days and then come back (**Shabani**).*

*We also visit regional centres and access the Internet in the town area. It is expensive but we have no alternative (**Abel**).*

*I sometimes go to the regional library to look for books (**Jonathan**).*

The travelling to town among students is mainly associated with acquiring the relevant human and physical support systems that are rarely accessible in the rural areas. The rural students seem to be aware that the available town-based resources can help them to broaden their knowledge and develop their competence.

However, it is reasonable to ask whether all the rural students would manage to regularly visit town areas and access the stated resources. It is obvious that staying in town requires students to have economic capital (money). But, as I have indicated in section 6.2.2 above, these students lack that kind of economic power, complaining instead of poverty and of having too many socio-economic responsibilities. There is a danger, therefore, of marginalising students who do not have the money to access those human and physical resources which are critical to their success.

Discussions with students also revealed that students' visits to town were also associated with a feeling of being less privileged than their colleagues in town. Students offered the following comments:

*We need to travel if we need any assistance. It is quite different from town-based students. They just walk to the regional centre and access any support (**David**).*

It is different from those living in town areas. They participate in all the events taking place there at the regional centre (Zainab).

For us from the rural areas, we really suffer the consequences: those near town can go to the Internet cafe several times until they get what they want (Wilson).

Those in town have access to many services (Jonathan).

The students' statements above demonstrate their feelings of powerlessness as almost all relevant learning resources are urban-based. Their town-based student colleagues, on the other hand, were able to drop in at the regional centres and access the available support services, or wander around town and access other resources such as Internet services.

This scenario of urban students in developing countries being privileged in accessing learning resources is also documented in the literature on distance education (Bhalalusesa, 2001; Olden and Mcharazo, 2000; Msuya and Maro, 2002; Gatsha, 2008, De hart and Venter, 2013). Given the fact that support services are vital to students' achievement of learning outcomes, there is a case to be made for reflecting on issues of equity in order to assist rural students to access relevant learning resources within their locations (Lockwood, 1995; Rumble, 2000; Dzakiria, 2005; Sharma, 2011; Krishnan, 2012).

6.3.2 Buying Books, Photocopying and Accessing Online Learning Materials

One of the challenges which students face in studying in the academic field is in accessing study materials and library support. In responding to such challenges, students said:

We have to look for books and other learning resources (Allen).

I just try to cope with them by contacting my colleagues. I get the study materials and photocopy them (Lambertha).

I download materials when I go to town and serve them in a floppy disc and sometimes in a flash (Koletha).

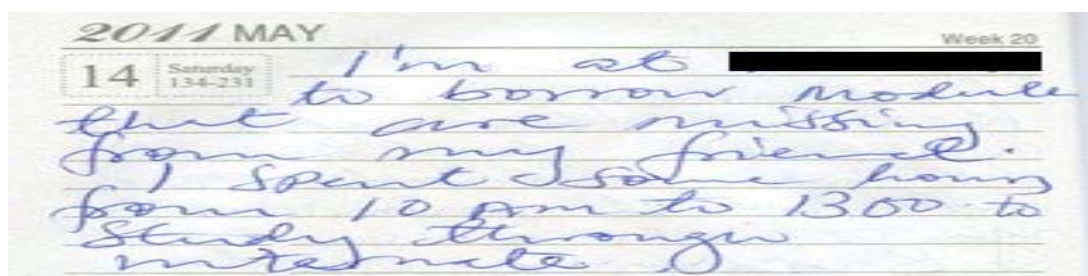
I told you that I have a modem, so I get an Internet connection and download materials (Magnus).

*We also buy books from the bookshops (**Amelia**).*

*I am buying the books as there is nothing for my course at the regional centre (**Daniel**).*

*I try to access the Internet and get the course outline, and use the references attached to find books in the library (**Wilson**).*

*Also, I get learning materials from my friends who are at the University of Dar es Salaam (**Magnus**).*



"I am at to borrow modules that are missing. I also spent some hours studying through the Internet."

Strategies for coping can be related to the idea that a field is:

"a social arena in which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources" (Jenkins, 1992: 84).

Students observed that there were difficulties in accessing printed study materials in the academic field of the OUT, so they photocopied and borrowed materials from their colleagues at the OUT and from other Universities in Tanzania. Such students effectively utilise social and economic capital in engineering successful outcomes to their studies. Similarly, other students decided to download materials and even bought their own personal copies of particular books.

These strategies enable students to accumulate a personal stock of learning materials at home. The possession of such a collection may then may then bring some flexibility in terms of the pace and space to study; these are crucial factors if students are to achieve successful learning outcomes. However, it remains the case that the majority of rural students are still limited by financial constraints and access to the capital necessary to achieve this is not evenly distributed.

6.3.3 Planning and Time Management

Lack of time for studying was the main challenge observed in all fields. In reducing the effects of this problem, some students documented the following:

*I have my timetable fixed on the wall (**Lambertha**).*

*I plan my time accordingly. There is time for work and time for studying (**Alpha**).*

*I plan my reading schedule and if I feel I will be disturbed at home, I go to the office (**Samwel**).*

*I know when to study, work and engage in family activities. That is what makes me manage my responsibilities well (**Wilson**).*

*As for my studies, one needs to be disciplined with time management (**James**).*

*I have a timetable which makes me study a bit every day (**Christian**).*

Issues of planning, time management and the preparation of timetables are among the strategies which enabled rural students to manage their studies, despite their multiple engagements in various social and economic activities. Indeed, these strategies would benefit any student, regardless of the mode of learning. However, there is the possibility that a student could prepare a timetable and fail to follow it due to lack of discipline and commitment. The aspect of ‘discipline’, as emphasised by James, above, is a significant factor in developing the study habits of students who largely work independently of tutors and their institutions.

6.3.4 Accessing Graduate Support and Holding Discussions with Colleagues

In solving the problems of distance, isolation, loneliness and inadequate access to tutor support, students reported the following:

*I look for my fellow students and we discuss together, or I look for a graduate in my area for guidance (**Alpha**).*

*I always wait until I go to the regional centre and meet with my fellow students for discussion (**James**).*

*I meet with my fellow students at the regional centres during examination and we do group discussions (**Zainab**).*

In case we do not get study materials we often contact our colleagues, or those who are through with the same courses (Neema).

I have people who are experienced with the system. They guide me on how to look for materials on the Internet and in the library, and also give advice on having group discussions with my colleagues. I find myself coping quite well (Alex).

I am happy that nowadays, we have got this ward executive who is a graduate of law from Tumaini University. At least, I can meet him and discuss things about the constitution (Daniel).

I get some advice from graduates in my community and they sometimes provide me with learning materials, or even share my challenges with them (Koletha).

Students, therefore, appear to contact and participate in group discussions during the period of examinations or at scheduled events in the regional centres. I verified this during my formal observations in the regional centres. Students were sitting in small groups of five to ten people, and were busy discussing different sources of learning materials. The lack of regular opportunities to interact in this way led to a number of complaints from students, who willingly acknowledged the relevancy of group discussion to their studies. Students' participation in group discussion seems to reduce the sense of isolation experienced within their localities. The students' responses also indicate that they occasionally obtain academic and learning materials from graduates within their localities. The implication of the students' responses is that studying independently is difficult, but these challenges can be eased by regular access and support from colleagues or tutors.

Studies show that students need to affiliate and identify themselves with colleagues and their institutions (Kember, 1990; Sharma, 2011). It is in group discussion where the 'aah' point may be achieved as students guide each other on what to do and where to go (Sharma, 2011). It is also suggested that discussions and interactions reduce academic pressure and reinforce learning (Moore, 1989; Simpson, 2000, 2002). However, there remains a great deal of uncertainty as to whether the methods used to facilitate interaction, to exchange knowledge and to share experiences among rural students are accessible and sustainable for each individual student.

6.3.5 Personal and Group Access to Private Tutors

Interview sessions with students revealed that students sometimes used private tutors to help them in their studies in order to compensate for the inadequacies and unavailability of their university tutors. Students reported:

I pay for my tutors whom I sometimes invite to assist (Daniel).

I use a teacher who graduated from the University of Dar es Salaam. He helps me so much (Adolf).

We look for graduate teachers to help us but we have to pay (Catherine).

We have to consult an advocate for legal issues, for example, and we organize ourselves and have a session and share the costs equally (Alpha).

The above responses suggest that students had access to personal tutors, as well as to group tutors. Sharing a tutor would be more cost effective for relatively poor students than paying for a personal tutor by oneself.

I asked students how they arranged their groups for teaching as they were distantly located from each other. Catherine said:

“Actually, we meet at the regional centre, especially during the examinations and the face-to-face sessions. As we are always grouped in our areas of specialization, it becomes easier to know each other and exchange contacts for future meetings.”

This was interesting to note as students used scheduled activities in the academic field of the OUT to network and communicate with each other.

I asked how much money students spend in accessing private or group tutors. They replied:

We pay five thousand for each student in the group (Catherine). (£2)

At times it can be as high as twenty thousand shillings per person (Alpha). (£8)

I pay 250,000 shillings per course. That includes transport and tuition costs (Daniel). (250,000=£100)

I have to give him 10,000 shillings in every session, at least to cover for his travel expenses and time (Adolf). (£4)

The costs for a group tutor, therefore, range from £2 to £8, while paying for a private tutor fluctuates from between £4 per session to £100 for a full course. The idea of paying for private and group tutoring may be associated with students' educational habitus, as there is a tendency to pay for tuition classes in primary and secondary schools in Tanzania. We can see from the students' responses that the same structure seems to be adopted and utilised in post-secondary students' study habits. However, this is not a surprise as it is a characteristic of players in the social field to employ capital in order to gain position in that social field (Jenkins, 1992; Mutch, 2006).

We can also see from this that the nature of the capital utilised in order to access the available cultural capital from the social field is of some importance. In this particular context, students employed economic capital to access the cultural capital that is embodied within other individuals. Students, therefore, searched outside their own institutions. This is a sensible strategy since the academic field provided inadequate support, which meant it was necessary for students to find other sources. However, students' awareness of the qualifications, background and abilities of these 'part time tutors' would be of some importance as students require and expect a high level of tutoring and guidance to be offered.

On the other hand, the idea of increasing costs through private 'tuition' works against what is surely one of the central functions of distance education at the OUT, which is to provide cost effective education for the majority (Rumble, 1997; Daniel, 2007; Krishnan, 2012). Therefore, perhaps I can legitimately ask: by continuing to entertain private tuition do we further marginalise those who do not have the economic power to access private tutor support?

6.3.6 Restrictions, Hiring Maids and Balancing Responsibilities

I discussed in section 6.2.3 above how students encountered different challenges when studying in the domestic field. The coping strategies students used to deal with this are exemplified by the following quotes:

I sometimes restrict my children from coming near me so that I can study (Sebalela).

I sometimes tell my children to leave me alone when I am busy studying (Neema).

I also have a helper/girl who assists in washing and cooking. I only cook on Sundays. That gives me ample time to study without much pressure (Catherine).

When I see there is too much interference from children, I leave the house and go to the office to study (Shabani).

I have to balance between my responsibilities as a family man and my studies (Abel).

I have to wait until after dinner, then I start studying. That's when my children will be asleep and the place becomes quite peaceful (James).

You just have to make sure that all the basic needs are available, and home activities are done at the right time (Koletha).

The statements above show that the students' decisions to study within or outside the domestic field appear to be determined by the circumstances in their homes. Having a peaceful environment, with the least disruption and a suitable space for learning, are probably the most important factors in allowing students to study at home. The absence of these conditions can often lead to low concentration levels among students, course failure, the postponement of studies, or even dropping out of the course. Therefore, an awareness of the difficulties that students face in their households is critical in influencing their academic success (Simpson, 2000).

6.4 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the challenges and coping strategies observed and discussed by rural students of the OUT. Although the adopted coping strategies were significant, they were not applied by all and were in some instances unsustainable. In this section, I will attempt to apply Bourdieu's analytical concepts of field, capital and habitus in discussing these findings. I shall also discuss how my findings help to describe the complexity of students' transformations and adaptation to the fields after their long exposure to teaching and learning practices, and to other socio-economic structures which exist in other fields.

Struggles in the Fields and their Implications

Discussions and observations conducted as part of this study found that students struggled to accommodate new practices and had to grapple with how to position themselves as active members in the fields in which they were engaged. The

struggles were mainly centred on the mediation between fields as these had variations in their rules and regulations. The structures and conditions in the fields were not permissive enough to allow the smooth movement from one field to another, and were also influenced by inadequate access to relevant support services, poor infrastructure and by an institutional failure to recognise the needs of students.

The challenges posed affected the relationship between habitus and fields. The structuring of habitus and its development depends on accessibility to the various forms of support which nurture that development. If only a partial relationship is formed, students are unable to explore the full, exciting potential that education can provide. For example, in the academic field, cost effective structures and flexibility in course scheduling were rarely implemented. This, in turn, interfered with students' socio-economic activities and caused some students to question their decision to study at a distance university (see section 6.2.1)

I was not surprised to see students applying strategies such as paying for private tutors and group discussions as these were strategies they had adopted in their previous educational systems, and which some now reverted to as a last resort. Many of these students also experienced challenges from within their families and communities, and from employers. These difficulties were also detrimental to students' educational progress, although access to support services from within the academic field would have reduced these problems to some extent. The transformation and success of habitus lies in the functionality of the field. If the field is not active enough to provide the conditions or situations that are suitable for transforming, structuring or developing habitus then it is virtually impossible to experience new behaviours or structures among individuals who occupy positions in the field.

Therefore, I place most emphasis on the functioning of the academic field of the OUT because I believe it is the most important. The factors that affect the domestic and rural fields are more variable as they are dependent on employers, community understanding and family readiness in order to engage in supporting students.

The Adopted Coping Strategies and Students' Possession of Capital

After reflecting on the challenges presented in section 6.2 of this chapter, it might be pertinent at this stage to ask: how do rural students cope with and manage their studies? The findings in my study show that the strategies adopted by students were mostly related to the use of cultural, economic and social capital. These forms of capital were at risk and were not equally accessible among the rural students but were influential in their studies and in their relationships in the domestic and rural fields. My analysis shows that some students had more access to these forms of capital than others and this led to continuing inequalities and marginalisation in accessing support among students.

Students, therefore, often used social capital in the form of networking, friendship and interaction in order to exchange knowledge, and in the sharing of social and learning resources. This interaction took place among students, tutors and available graduates in the rural fields. Such interactions relieved students' feelings of isolation, frustration and distance from their tutors and institutions.

Students also used their economic capital (money) to access physical and human support systems that were inadequate or unavailable in their fields. The ability to access and use such capital enabled students to position themselves in the field and to accommodate the practices they required.

The use of cultural capital was also apparent among students. I would say students invested or exchanged all forms of capital that were available in the fields in order to look for the required cultural capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital is available in three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalised. Knowing how to access and apply these forms of capital influences their possession. For instance, the findings in this study show that students shared their embodied capital (knowledge) with others in group discussions. They also accessed information from their private tutors and graduates in the rural field. This contributed to the broadening of their knowledge base, and helped them to develop confidence in understanding the course materials.

Moreover, students applied objectified capital in the form of laptops, computers, library resources, personal books, printed study materials and modems to search for knowledge. Students require exposure to material searching skills, reading and understanding. Students also looked forward to obtaining institutionalised capital towards the end of their studies in the form of a degree certificate. The forms of capital that students use and access in fields seem to operate in a circular form, as first one form is accessed, and then its application leads to the accessing of another. Indeed, the acquisitions of skills that can gain access to these forms of capital are essential components if students are to achieve successful outcomes.

The coping strategies adopted by these students were largely successful in enabling students to learn within their localities. However, the strategies were unevenly applied among students, limiting the extent to which these students were able to develop the relevant competencies, knowledge and skills suitable to fulfil their socio-economic goals.

Research indicates that good learning is achieved when students are effectively supported in their learning (Lentell, 1994: 50). If this is really the case, it is necessary to properly integrate support services such as academic and non-academic provision within the teaching and learning practices of the OUT's academic field. This would help to improve the learning experiences of rural students in Tanzania and strengthen the expected relationship between habitus and field.

The next chapter provides details of the support available in fields, and discusses participants' support needs and suggestions for improvement.

7 Chapter Seven: Students' Needs and Available Support Services in the Rural, Academic and Domestic Fields

7.1 Introduction

In Chapter Six, I discussed the challenges and coping strategies that students adopted as they travelled across fields. However, these coping strategies did not permanently resolve the challenges that students experienced as most of them required the use of economic capital, which was a scarce commodity among most rural students. This created an unequal situation as some students had greater access to support than others. Problems such as these can affect students' academic success and might even delay the completion of their studies.

The main discussion in this chapter centres on issues related to support practices in the fields. It also discusses students' needs and suggestions for improving teaching and learning support practices in rural Tanzania.

This chapter is divided into five sections. It starts with an introduction and it is followed by a discussion on students' understanding of the meaning of support. The third section presents details of the existing support that is available in the rural, domestic and academic fields, and how accessible such support is. The fourth section deals with students' support needs, and discusses suggestions on how teaching and learning support for rural students in the rural areas can be improved. This section also discusses the available opportunities for support that exist within the rural field. The chapter ends with a summary and conclusion.

7.2 Students' Perceptions of the Meaning of Support

It was important to understand students' perceptions of support as these would act as a basis for future discussion of the nature of support, and of the type of support services that students expect the OUT to provide. In relation to the meaning of support, students offered the following responses:

I take support as a helping hand for moving forward (Abel).

Support! I think it is a help, when you are stuck somewhere, you need to be supported (Alpha).

It is an act of assisting someone to stand on their own. For example, if someone pays for your tuition fees, then that is a great support as the financial burden will be reduced (Magnus).

It is something which is needed to achieve your goals or objectives. I mean, whatever one works on, it has some goals. But in order to achieve the goals there are certain requirements which need to be fulfilled in order to make the goal achievable. I think that is support (Neema).

It is something which could enable someone to succeed in one's aims or goals. It could be moral, material or financial support (Simon).

I consider support as an assistance provided to someone in order to facilitate his or her studies. Things like learning materials, fees, or even ideas could be taken as support. It could even be assistance provided at home in addressing home chores (Amelia).

I think support in my studies is concerned with knowledge of ICT, and things like financial assistance (Bakari).

The students' statements above reveal that, to them, support is understood to be an act of assistance that is geared at enabling them to attain their goals. It also appears that support is linked to the process of overcoming certain obstacles of an academic, social and financial nature. This may be associated with the difficult conditions that students encounter in the rural areas, which at times have proved to be detrimental to their studies.

Students' documentation also indicates some peculiarities in their conceptualization of support: for example, much importance seems to have been given to financial support. It is possible that such financial support is particularly required by students living under these circumstances, especially if the high costs of education in the academic field are taken into consideration.

The discussion on the meaning of support as portrayed by the students above is not very different from that in the literature, which associates support with activities, facilities, resources and the range of strategies that are geared to 'help/assist' students in attaining their goals (Garrison and Baynton, 1987; Melofi, 1998; Mays, 2000; Simpson, 2002; Krishnan, 2012). It is important to note that rural students expect to

receive different forms of support which would help them to attain their planned goals. Such support could be provided by institutions or individuals. Enabling students to access such support would help them to gain confidence, to develop a sense of perseverance and increase their determination to succeed.

The following section describes and discusses the different forms of support that can be accessed by students in the rural, domestic and academic fields of the OUT.

7.3 Available Support Services in the Fields

The Academic Field

Discussions with students and observations carried out at selected regional centres of the OUT revealed the availability of a wide range of support services that are provided for students. Table twelve presents the available support at the OUT headquarters and at selected regional centres.

Support Available at the Headquarters	Support Available at the Regional Centres
Library Services	Provision of course outlines, printed study materials and access to tape recordings
Tutor support, academic guidance according to subject specialization, and administrative support	Tutor support in limited areas of subject expertise
Guidance and counselling	Guidance and counselling
Information and eLearning resources on the University website	Mini-library services, information and computer laboratory
Printed study materials and study guides	Orientation and face-to-face sessions
	Communication with students via local radio, display boards, email and mobile phone

Table 12: Support services at the OUT headquarters and regional centres

The observed forms of support services presented in Table 12 above were confirmed by participants during interview sessions. They said:

I normally deal with guidance and counselling. The regional centre provides study materials and I guide students accordingly. I also do tutorials to supplement the students' self-study (Tutor, Region A).

We give study materials, we have a computer lab and services are free of charge. We also have a library though we have very few books (Director-Region D).

I think the most valuable support is the provision of study materials. There are also teachers at the regional centre. There is also learning space at the regional centre (Adolf).

I think the OUT has done well to place tutors, who are quite helpful. They give us information, help in registration and provide advice. They encourage us, and I think we are comfortable with them (Christian).

I talk to students and I also guide them in solving difficult topics. For example, in the faculty of science we have very few students, they are mostly from six leavers, and a few have the diploma (Tutor 4).

Apart from that we have a mini-library. The OUT provides books for our libraries (Director Region A).

The responses from the participants above give the impression that they are reassured by the availability of support in the regional centres. However, the actual situation in the regional centres tells a different story. I discussed in section 6.2.1 of Chapter Six that rural students experience difficulties in accessing the stated support. They also incur the costs of transport and accommodation in order to access the support available at the regional centres. This means that rural students gain little benefit from the stated forms of support, while they are also marginalised from the support services that are available at the OUT headquarters in Dar es Salaam.

Table 12 above shows the various forms of support I observed at the headquarters of the OUT. These included library services, the presence of tutors with varying specializations and access to Internet services in the library. However, these forms of support are only available to those students who live in Dar es Salaam and nearby regions. For example, the response from the participants above indicates the presence of mini-libraries in the regional centres. However, these libraries were observed to have a shortage of relevant up-to-date books, although this is not the case at the OUT headquarters which has a large library with different sections, and is staffed by a number of librarians.

I asked one of the top officials about these differences and he said it was difficult to comment on the availability of resources in the regional centres as there are no libraries there. The regional centres only hold a stock of reserved books, and so do not qualify as being a library.

The official I spoke to clarified that the OUT had received funds from the World Bank to buy books for their students, and that they were waiting for a book consignment to arrive from India. On arrival, the books would then be distributed to the regional centres. The availability of the awaited books should play a significant role in improving the intellectual capacities of students and help to broaden their knowledge base.

I also asked some of the top officials how rural students accessed the support that is available at both the regional centres and at headquarters. They replied:

*We have developed a mechanism which ensured that the maximum support that is offered in this office reaches the students. First of all we have our website. So we believe that all students in the regions and districts can access the OUT website (**Top official –Rank 5**).*

*Actually, we are providing a number of services. We provide study materials which students get through regional centres. Students are also free to visit our centres for guidance (**Top official-Rank 4**).*

The responses above indicate an absence of awareness about how limited the resources really are at the regional centres and how this might affect the rural students at large. There is also an assumption that Internet services are accessible in the rural areas and that all students can easily access information and support services online. However, this is not the case as remote rural areas in Tanzania are plagued by infrastructural challenges, as we have seen, and this limits students' ability to access online support (Furuholt and Kristiansen, 2007; URT, 2011b; World Bank, 2010a). Therefore, students with limited access to Internet services are marginalised because they cannot depend on regular access to the OUT website in order to seek information and other relevant support.

The other top official quoted above also focused his attention on the fact that students have to access support from the regional centres. This automatically

excludes rural students who do not live close to the regional centres. A better awareness of the infrastructural challenges, the costs of transport and the poor learning environment in rural areas would help officials to address these important issues of equity in the provision of support services.

On the other hand, discussions with administrators, revealed a number of financial challenges that affected the provision of support services in the regional centres. They commented:

We have been receiving money from the government, but the figure is almost the same as we received back in 2001. It is below one billion Tanzanian shillings per year (approximately £400,000). So there is no way that the materials could be produced based on students' fees (Top official- Rank 4).

The provision of support services is still low, given financial limitations in our institution. We still have a long way to go (Top official –Rank five).

And, actually, if I had enough resources I could have reduced the numbers of trips that rural students have to make to the regional centre. I would have followed them to their places (Director –Region D).

And with that limited resources at the centre, it becomes very difficult for me to move around (Director-Regional centre B).

The views expressed above demonstrate the inadequate access that officials have to government support and to the planning and decision-making processes at the OUT. There is obviously a problem of mobility among regional directors as they lack the means of transport to travel to different areas. The OUT also seems to have experienced problems in accessing funds from the government as it still receives the same sum they had ten years ago. With a lack of financial capital, the OUT will find it difficult to provide the quality of education to students that it desires in both the regional centres and the rural areas.

The financial challenges that the OUT is facing are also being experienced in other universities throughout India (Kumar et al, 2011; Sharma, 2011), Zimbabwe (Kangai and Bukaliya, 2011) and South Africa (Lephalala and Makoe, 2012). It might be that insufficient attention is being given to distance education across the nations of the developing world, with investment instead being made in areas that are expected to provide more immediate returns. There is a need, therefore, to build political will and

create awareness of the contribution that distance education makes in the fields of social and economic development.

The Rural Field

My discussion with students on the availability of support did not end with the academic field. It extended to the rural and domestic fields, the findings of which are presented in Table 13 below.

Support in Rural Field	Support in Domestic Field
Presence of graduates with undergraduate and Master's qualifications. Employers' support (money, permission to travel and attend scheduled events) Support from peers and friends Space for learning (teacher resource centres and in public schools)	Moral and financial support from husband, wives and housemaids Presence of graduates in families Space and time for learning

Table 13: Summary of available support in the rural and domestic fields

Table 13 above reveals the support that students accessed within their localities, both at home and in the rural community. Such support is often provided by employers and community members, while support in the domestic field is usually provided by family members; however, both systems appear to motivate and sustain students' learning within their localities.

For example, three students commented on the support they received from colleagues and friends in the workplace and in the community:

In my working station, for example, I get encouraged in my course because there are those who studied through the OUT and they managed to complete it successfully (Koletha).

*I get enough moral support from my friends at work which makes my reading easy. They sometimes call me and wish me the best of luck in my examination (**Wilson**).*

*As a teacher, I have my students who took the science course and they are now graduates and employed. I get help from them too (**Simon**).*

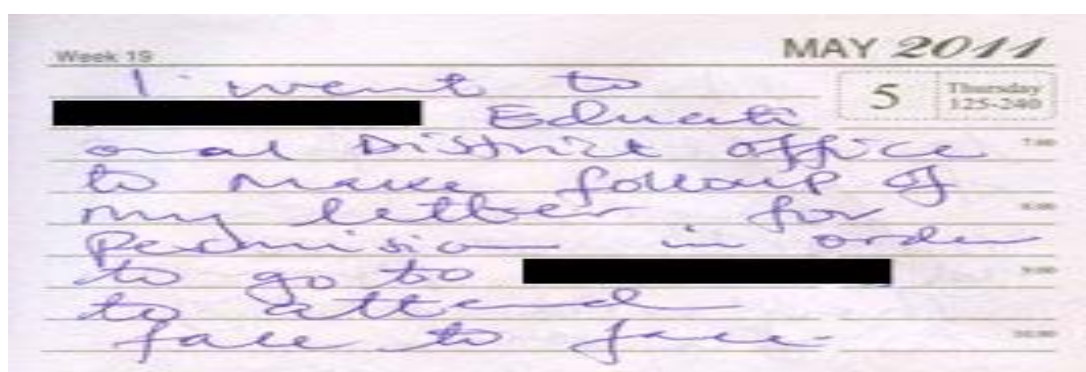
Others spoke about the support they obtained from their employers:

*This year I was given by my district a total of two hundred thousand shillings for buying books and stationery. I am very grateful to my district Education Officer for the assistance, even though it's small as I only managed to buy a few books (**Shaban**).*

*I get some support from the district council. They paid for my tuition fees and other contributions (**Neema**).*

The responses above show that any support received from outside the walls of academia is crucial as students often have other needs to meet, apart from academic ones. Interaction and networking is crucial for those adult students who have multiple responsibilities in their families and communities.

Students also seem to depend on the support provided by their employers. For example, the diary entry below:



"I went to the educational district office to follow up my letter asking for permission to attend a face-to-face session at the regional centre."

Another student said:

*The only support I get from my work place is permission to go to study and sit for my examination (**Abel**).*

Indeed, dependency of such kind is not unusual in the practice of distance education, as employers are expected to provide at least financial support and the time for

learning (Lockwood, 1995; Simpson, 2002). However, whether such support is granted depends on the character of particular employers, the job description and the policy of the employer's company. Any financial support obtained from employers is very welcome as it enables students to buy books and stationery and to pay tuition fees, amongst other things.

The Domestic Field

As discussed in section 6.2.3 of Chapter Six, studying in the domestic field is both difficult and challenging for rural students due to their involvement in marital, parental and community responsibilities. Such problems often make it difficult for students to spend enough time on their studying and to give it their full attention. However, students reported that the academic and social support they received from family members and partners helped motivate them to continue:

My wife is such a big help at home. If there is no peace and understanding at home, there is no study. To be honest, OUT would be out of my reach. Believe me, if the family is not accommodative and understanding, you cannot study (Wilson).

I am greatly supported by my wife. She is just wonderful. She knows well when I need time to study. She also urges me to continue with my study. Similarly, my relatives, they want me to get this degree (Christian).

For example, my family understands that I am studying so they give me space when I am busy and pray for my success (James).

My wife tries to make the home calm and peaceful (Jonathan).

Even now, my family encourages me a lot, and whenever I am financially stuck they help me (Sebalela).

My parents are in the forefront to encourage me. They are there at home when I am gone for my examinations. They take care of the children (Zainab).

Even in my family, my husband is very supportive. He encourages me to work hard so that I may pass the examinations (Koletha).

The findings above demonstrate that rural students access support from their husbands, wives, relatives and parents. The support given included materials, as well as financial and moral support. These forms of support motivate, encourage and enable students to gain in confidence as they are inspired by those closest to them.

On the other hand, the absence of support from home may be detrimental to students' success in learning.

For instance, Wilson, above, tells us that without peace and understanding in the family, it would have been very difficult to study throughout the entire distance education course. This is a good example of a family which has successfully come to terms with the problem of how to divide time between studies and family and community matters. Therefore, dealing with the issues and concerns that surround family life, while still finding the quality time necessary for study, are important factors to consider if adult students are to successfully manage and sustain their studies.

The support experiences demonstrated in the rural, domestic and academic field are, therefore, significant in maintaining the relationship between the agents (students) and fields. The support observed is necessary in enabling students to assume their positions and observe those 'rules of the game' which are critical to their studies. However, the discussion from the fields above identifies the fact that there were shortages in accessing some of the academic and non-academic support, which caused students problems in maintaining their relationship with the fields. In order to reduce the impact of these challenges, students identified their own particular needs for support which they believed would improve practices in the fields. Moreover, tutors and administrators also suggested factors that could improve support structures in the academic field of the OUT which, in turn, might help to improve students' experiences in the rural context.

7.4 Students' Needs, Suggestions and Available Opportunities in the Rural Field

7.4.1 Students' Needs

First, I need to be provided with adequate and timely study materials. Secondly, I need support in paying fees. Thirdly, I need to get lecturers to make our studying a bit easier (Amelia).

If I get enough study materials, have contacts with the tutors and access the Internet, I will be better off to study and pass my examinations (Wilson).

*Regional centres should extend their services to the rural students by opening study centres which are accessible to all the students (**Daniel**).*

*It is quite obvious that we need to get academic advice from our teachers. They also need to visit us too (**Christian**).*

*We need money in order to be in a position to access learning resources (**Neema**).*

*I think we need a professional counsellor in the regional centre (**Catherine**).*

*I need lectures as often as possible, I need to get results on time, and above all we should also get loans (**Zainab**).*

*I need money to enable me to buy learning materials, pay for my transport, food and accommodation when visiting the regional centre (**Adolf**).*

*The OUT should establish study centres which are convenient and useful to students (**Catherine**).*

*I need effective communication between me and the regional centre, and I need to be informed (**Koletha**).*

*We need guidance and counselling, especially us from rural areas. People get discouraged due to difficulties in their education (**Abel**).*

*It is equally our wish that the regional centres be sufficiently equipped and supplied with enough learning resources. We wish we could have up-to-date books in the library and enough academicians (**Sebalela**).*

*I want the OUT to be flexible in practice if one has a problem, and thus could not attend a practical session during the planned session; the tutors should be ready to arrange for another assessment or practical session (**Bakari**).*

*I think the OUT should plan to explore students' living environments, and plan on how they should provide academic support. It may be a good learning for them too (**Allen**).*

*It would be more reasonable and probably better if the OUT had four sessions of tests and examinations. For example, a test could be done in February and if a person fails to do it, then do it in April/June. Then the examination could also be done in June and September/January, instead of waiting for a whole year when you miss a session (**Daniel**).*

The above comments represent only some of the needs that were expressed by the students. A bigger picture is presented in the table below based on the frequency of the stated need.

	Needs	No. of Students (24)
1	Tutor Support	19
2	Study materials	15
3	Establish study centres/OUT branch at the district level	14
4	Use of media (computers, laptops, CDs, tapes)	11
5	Financial support	11
6	Internet services	10
7	Timely feedback	9
8	Improvement and flexibility in course practices	9
9	Effective communication and interaction	8
10	Improved library services at the regional centre	8
11	Face-to-face sessions with tutor/student	7
12	Guidance and counselling	7
13	Visits of tutors to students' local environment	5
14	Time for learning (employers' provisions)	5
15	Computer skills	3
16	Meetings and group discussions	3
17	Study skills	1

Source: Transcribed data

Table 14: Summary of students' support needs

The availability of tutor support, study materials and the establishment of study centres were among the needs that were more frequently stated than the rest. It should be noted that these three forms of support do not require the application of sophisticated technology as they are related primarily to human and physical resources. The availability of tutors and self-teaching study materials carries special significance in the education of distance-learning students, especially in areas such as rural Tanzania where the application of technology is still fraught with difficulty due to infrastructural problems.

Indeed, the desire to have tutors in place is of great importance to students. After all, the presence of a tutor facilitates, encourages, directs and assists in problem solving (Lentel, 2003; Modesto and Tau, 2009). The fact that tutor support was mentioned

most frequently by respondents reflects the critical need that students have for this type of support. However, a student such as Zainabu, above, appears to require constant support from tutors which is unlikely to be always available due to the nature of teaching in distance education. Thus, an awareness of the practices of distance education requires that students must assume more independence in such a context, despite the lack of other physical forms of support such as Internet access, well-equipped study centres and libraries.

The need for flexible practice is also crucial when considering students as adult learners with multiple responsibilities. The desire for more flexibility in practical training and examination sessions is clear in the quotes above. This would allow students to engage with other social and cultural responsibilities that are clearly vital elements of their domestic and rural habitus.

Students also describe an urgent need for study centres to be located close to their homes, in a context where all the existing regional centres are based in urban areas. Well-established centres could, in fact, address all the needs presented in Table 14 above. Perhaps this is why students placed less emphasis on some of their other needs, as the establishment of study centres would fulfil most of their desires.

Students would also like the OUT to visit their locations, interact with them and have realistic plans in place to support their needs. They would also appreciate an occasional visit from their tutor, although there is a realisation that frequent visits would be unlikely because of the distance involved. Nonetheless, visiting students in their own locations would help to balance the provision of support and reduce the sense of marginalisation that currently exists among rural students. For example, academic staff from the headquarters of the Botswana College of Distance Learning (BOCODOL) visits remote located students and provide relevant support through the established community study centres in districts (Nonyongo, 2003; Nonyongo and Ngengebule, 2008).

Other needs such as access to information, face-to-face sessions, financial support, the provision of library services and guidance and counselling are equally important in enhancing the education of students. It was surprising to note that study skills

training was among the least mentioned needs, with only a single student referring to it. However, in reality such a need is a basic one as students came from varying educational backgrounds. The need to develop study skills was certainly observed in practice during the face-to-face sessions I attended. The need to support students in developing study skills was also emphasised by administrators, who said:

*We also have poor performance because our students lack study skills (**Director – Region A**).*

*We are having applicants who do not have the skills to manage their learning as distance learners. They do not know the ABC of using information technology, how to search for materials, or develop study habits for independent learning. I think that is the core problem (**Top official- Rank 5**).*

Developing study skills in order to manage their studies may be a significant factor as students have different educational backgrounds and often do not have sufficient time to study due to their multiple commitments. It is clear that the provision of both academic and non-academic support systems are essential to these students in their academic journeys.

7.4.2 Other Participants' Suggestions for Improved Practice in the Academic Field

Identifying areas for improved practice from tutors and administrators was an important aspect of this study, and I present a summary of these below in tabular form.

Responsible Person	Proposals/Recommendations
OUT top officials (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government should improve the rural infrastructure • Record tutoring sessions in media e.g. in audio and audio-visual format • Open study centres at the district level and equip the centres with computers and mini-libraries • Utilise government buildings at the district level to support rural students • Improve face-to-face sessions and make them more academic • Prepare memorandum of understanding for institutional collaboration in regions in order to have more tutors and other learning facilities for students' use. • Provide laptops to students under soft loan arrangement • Assist students to build a culture of using online services • Advise students to use mobile phones as a device for learning
Regional Directors (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have sufficient tutor representatives in the faculties • Establish study centres at district level • Provide regional transport for easy movement in the region • Install Internet services in the regional centres for students' use • Prepare rotational schedules for tutors so that they can be more mobile and not just centred in the same location all the time (i.e. the OUT headquarters) • Harmonise resources available within the region • Support students in their locations (both practically and in information sharing) • Establish examination co-ordination centres around the regions • Provide payment for tutors who do extra jobs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have adequate funds to support regional and study centres • Use technology to teach students in their localities (radio and mobile phones)
Tutors in the regional centres (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide adequate study materials to all students without delay • Reduce administrative duties of tutors so that they can concentrate on academic tasks • Have sufficient academic staff • Link students with resource personnel available in their region • Combine traditional ways of teaching with modern technology • Visit students in their localities • Equip students with study skills • Provide tutor support to the rural locations • Have professional counsellors at the regional level • Provide Internet services at the regional level • Establish study centres at the district level where study materials could be distributed and examinations conducted • Fund activities at the regional centres • Prepare schedules so that supervision could be carried out in the students' living environment, mostly at the district level • Ensure proper documentation of students' results at Headquarters • Treat students as valuable customers who should be given every available support

Table 15: Summary of suggestions from tutors and administrators

The summarised suggestions noted here in Table 15 above confirm the problems highlighted by students in Chapter Six. The suggestions also relate to the specified

needs of students in section 7.4.1 above. The suggestions provided by tutors, regional directors and top OUT officials can be grouped as follows:

1. The first group refers to the establishment of study centres, particularly at the district level. This would enable students to access support within their own locations. If well established, the centres could successfully address the human and physical challenges of rural students.
2. The second group centres on improving practices at the regional centre level by providing tutors in relevant areas of specialisation. Some suggested having tutor representatives per faculty. In addition, it was also suggested that the regional centres should be resourced with other facilities such as Internet access and mini-libraries.
3. The third set of suggestions refers to using all the human resources available in the districts to help students, while also enabling improved collegial relationships with other institutes: for example, through linking with other willing colleges and universities in the regions. Tutors and administrators also proposed the use of qualified academics who could take on the role of part-time tutors. Regarding this, the induction of distance education practices is imperative since the tutors proposed have backgrounds in conventional education.
4. The topic of blended learning also emerged in our discussions. This fourth group of suggestions emphasised the use of traditional and modern technology in teaching and supporting students. Suggestions centred on the use of media such as Internet access, mobile phones, tape recorders and CDs. The continued use of face-to-face sessions and tutoring support was also proposed.
5. The final group of suggestions focused on funding processes to improve rural infrastructure and transport systems. Such actions would improve the mobility of tutors and regional directors who are currently urban-based.

The five suggested areas for improvement stated above indicate how students perceived their teaching and learning experiences. In section 6.2 of Chapter Six, I discussed how the difficulties students encountered are likely to limit their potential to develop intellectually and acquire critical commentary skills. Some of these proposed areas are by no means new in the documented practices of the OUT so perhaps the problem may lie with the issue of practical implementation.

For example, the document relating to the establishment of the OUT (URT, 1990) clearly states that the university should develop well-resourced regional centres that would prove useful to students, tutors and the public (81). Moreover, the regional centres were to act as centres for distributing study materials and would also serve as libraries. The use of media (e.g. face-to-face sessions, radio, television, audio and video cassettes) was also proposed in order to facilitate the education of those students involved in distance learning (URT, 1990: 100).

In addition, regional centres were supposed to coordinate and supervise the activities of the study centres within the students' localities (URT, 1990: 81). This is also discussed in the OUT students' affairs policy and operational procedures (OUT, 2009d) which states that study centres were to provide relevant support services in order to facilitate students' interaction. Study centres were also meant to provide mini-libraries. The need to establish suitable study centres was also discussed by tutors and regional directors:

*We are insisting that the OUT establishes more study centres at district level. This will assist students to get support and solve their problems (**Tutor seven**).*

*From what I have experienced I think there is a need to establish study centres in every district. I think that would be helpful. If possible, even the study materials and Internet services could be placed in the study centres (**Director- Region D**).*

The establishment of study centres would certainly help to lessen the sense of isolation that is currently experienced by the rural students of the OUT. The former vice-chancellor of the OUT (Mmari, 1999) first had the idea of providing support for students close to their homes. For example, he insisted that teaching practice should be carried out close to students' homes so that the costs of transport and accommodation incurred by distance students would be reduced. This proposition

ties in with the students' findings presented in section 6.2.1 and verifies the need to support students within their own localities.

A further document by former vice-chancellor Mmari (1999: 120-121) recommended the use of technology such as email, Internet, audio, video conferencing and an electronic library. This is in line with a comment provided by one of the participants:

The University is trying to modernise our programmes, but the infrastructure does not support this. So distance learning programmes should contain both ways, modern and traditional, in order to accommodate the varied needs of students in their locations (Tutor 2).

This tutor proposes the use of a blended learning system which accommodates the needs of those with access to technology and those without. The use of technology in this context is significant as it can cater for students' needs, regardless of their geographical boundaries.

While Tanzania still faces great infrastructural challenges, this does not mean that Internet connectivity is a problem throughout the entire country. Studies indicate that ICT and access to electricity is largely available in urban areas, although less so in the rural context (Furuholt and Kristiansen, 2007; World Bank, 2010a; URT, 2011b).

In the meantime, until these initiatives are properly established, the use of traditional modes such as print, television, video and face-to-face sessions will have to suffice. However, this period of transition is acceptable as other institutions in the developing countries also utilise the same traditional modes, at least until the process of improving the technological infrastructure is completed (Aderinoye et al, 2009; Wright et al, 2009; Guri-Roselblit, 2009; Sharma, 2011; Makoe and Lephalala, 2012).

Similarly, the OUT's ICT policy (OUT, 2010c) has identified problems that appear to hinder the effective use of ICT in teaching and supporting students. These problems include poor access to Internet access for OUT students and staff; high bandwidth costs; limited connection to local and international education and research databases; and the lack of satisfactory local area networks in the regional centres (5). The policy also highlights the poor communication and inefficient platforms that

exist between students and tutors (7). The policy statement intends to rectify this situation by making ICT a viable option for all regional centres, staff and students. This echoes the call of one of the regional directors who emphasised the inadequacies of the regional centres. He said:

We need to have computers, photocopiers and Internet. We need to have modern devices which go with the current technological advancement (Director – Region B).

All of these still await implementation by the OUT.

My analysis of documents from the OUT and the government and the statements from tutors and administrators indicate that there is a great need for improved practices in the regional centres, as well as in the marginalised rural areas. What is lacking in the documents reviewed is an implementation plan that would solicit financial support from the government, allied to the political will to fight for the technological resources that are necessary components of modern universities throughout the world.

The OUT appears to be powerless as it does not seem to have the financial capital required to enhance the effective practice of distance education in the regional centres, as well as in rural areas (OUT, 2010a, 2011b, 2012a, 2013). The OUT was established with the purpose of serving the wider population in order to improve the country's socio-economic development (OUT, 1990, 1993). This means its value and worth should be seriously considered by the government as there is still a great need to widen the breadth and scope of higher education in Tanzania (BEST, 2011, 2012).

7.4.3 Existing Opportunities for Supporting Students in the Rural Community

The eight months I spent in the field with the students helped me to familiarise myself with their concerns, and with the teaching and learning practices at the OUT. It also helped me to identify potential resources that would facilitate learning amongst students.

First, I noticed that previous graduates from the OUT and from other universities had the potential to guide existing distance students in academic matters and to help

counsel them in the socio-economic challenges that limit students' effectiveness in their studies. These graduates worked in different sectors in the rural community, although the majority worked in the education sector. Some had an undergraduate degree while others had a Master's degree. I realised that some of these previous graduates could serve as part-time tutors at the district level. However, before they could do so, induction in the teaching and learning practices of the OUT would be necessary as some graduates had an educational background very different from that of the distance learning students.

Secondly, I observed a number of teachers' resource centres which are scattered all over Tanzania. They are located in both rural and urban areas and are used mainly for enabling teachers to develop professionally and academically. The centres are also supposed to serve as information centres, material distribution centres, educational evaluation centres, library services and meeting points for education official (Mushi, 2003).

Therefore, these buildings could potentially be used as study centres in the rural communities as it would reduce the costs of hiring a new building. Naturally, the necessary arrangements would have to be made with the government in order to allow for multiple uses of the centres. The idea of using teachers' resource centres as study centres was also raised by one of the students, who said:

There is a teachers' resource centre, it is big and it can play the role of a study centre. But also there is a district library (Zainab).

It is my opinion, therefore, that the centres could be used as focal points for supporting students, especially in occasional tutor support meetings and for the distribution of printed study materials. In this way, students would not need to travel into town so frequently.

The presence of public primary and secondary schools at district and village level is also worthy of consideration as these buildings could also be used as study centres. I also observed a number of conventional universities and research and scientific centres in some of the regional towns. These are potential sites for establishing collegial relationships and might address the problem of inadequate physical and

human resources. A memorandum of understanding would probably have to be prepared to allow the OUT to utilise such resources. However, this is not a new process as the OUT already has access to a number of libraries and practical science centres at some of the universities, although those sites are far away from the regional centres sampled in this study.

It is probably the case, then, that if all the available support services within the regions are examined and utilised properly, costs could certainly be reduced. The use of existing teaching and learning resources within students' locations have also been pioneered by other African countries such as South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe and proved effective in minimising the challenges that students faced (Nonyongo, 2003; Gatsha, 2008; Ngengebule, 2008; Kangai et al, 2011).

Moreover, the findings on students' challenges discussed in section 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 of Chapter Six demonstrate that students were experiencing problems in accessing the Internet and electricity. The observations I carried out in this study revealed that all of the rural students sampled had mobile phones while mobile phone services were generally good, with the exception of only a few areas. I also noted that a few students had modems from the same mobile phone providers. Mobile devices could, therefore, be made better use of by the OUT for academic and administrative purposes. Mobile learning has acquired great significance in its ability to facilitate teaching and support at a distance, with good examples of this already available from developing countries such as India, Malaysia and Namibia (Keendjele, 2008; Kumar et al, 2011; Lim et al, 2011).

Regarding access to electricity, Tanzania is among the countries in the world which is endowed with abundant access to solar energy throughout the year. Such a renewable resource could be captured to solve the existing problem of the lack of electricity, which was apparent in the regional centres and in rural areas. I discussed the issue of electricity with one of the leading officials who said that solar power had already been installed in some of the distantly located regional centres. This idea, therefore, may be applicable in other centres and even in the proposed study centres at the district level.

7.5 Summary and Conclusion

Students' Needs and Available Support Practices in the Fields

My discussions with students in the fields resulted in the identification of various needs that require action by the OUT in order to allow effective learning among students. The needs were identified in relation to students' exposure to the teaching and support practices in the academic field of the OUT. The following needs, amongst others, were identified by students: tutor support, the provision of study centres close to students' localities, the timely and adequate provision of printed study materials, improved library services, face-to-face sessions which encourage the solving of academic problems, and access to Internet services. I believe the needs identified by the students in my study are significant, given the geographical distance and poor rural infrastructure in Tanzania.

Most of these needs centre on the desire to improve academic prosperity among the rural students. The successful education of quality of the support services provided to them and how accessible they are (Sewart, 1993; Tait, 2000; Rumble, 2000; Simpson, 2000, 2012; Dzakiria, 2008; Sharma, 2011; Krishnan, 2012). However, there is a significant discrepancy between what is expected in terms of the provision of resources at the regional centres, and what is actually available to the students. The inadequate access to support poses challenges for the students and can hinder their own educational development, as well as inhibiting the opportunity to transform their habitus.

Regional centres were established for the purpose of providing academic and non-academic support systems that were situated close to students' environments (OUT, 2009a). However, this strategy is not borne out by the observations conducted in this study. Indeed, most of the relevant support systems (a well-stocked library, Internet services and specialized tutors) are all situated at the headquarters of the OUT at Dar-es-Salaam, which is located far away from the regional centres sampled. Such a situation reduces the relevancy of regional centres in facilitating students' learning.

Participants' Suggestions and Desire to Improve Practice in the Rural Context

My discussions with tutors and administrators regarding issues related to support services and their relevancy in facilitating students' learning in the fields led to a number of suggestions which I have discussed in section 7.4.2 of this chapter. These included: the establishment of study centres at the district level; the adoption of blended learning; employing tutors according to their areas of specialization; establishing collegial relationships in the regions; and improving support practices in the regional centres.

These suggestions appear to address at least some of the difficulties faced by students, as presented in this study. By acting on these suggestions the OUT could do much to address the relationship between habitus and field among its students, particularly as the adequate availability of support, and access to it, are central factors in maintaining that relationship.

This study also observed potential areas in the rural field which could be utilised to improve students' experiences in the fields. For instance, it observed educational institutions that could act as centres for human and physical support, as well as examining the possibility of using graduates in rural locations to act as part-time tutors to students in those areas. In addition, the potential for mobile learning could be exploited as all the students sampled in this study had their own mobile phones and could be contacted in that way.

Based on the findings reported, I suggest that the OUT reconsider its present teaching and learning support practices, particularly with regard to part-time students in rural locations. After all, it is the OUT's role to facilitate the education of its students, regardless of their part-time status or geographical location. Ensuring the availability and accessibility of relevant support services should be a priority at the OUT.

8 Chapter Eight: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of my study's findings and offers a set of recommendations based on these. In theoretical terms, my argument in this chapter centres on the 'logic of practice' at the OUT, referring to the relationship between the concepts of capital, habitus and field, which have been used to guide my discussion throughout.

The logic of practice goes beyond observed practices (activities) in the field to include the practical logic of agents who occupy space in the field (Bourdieu, 1990; Grenfell, 2008; Rawolle and Lingard, 2008). Structured practices in the academic field, for example, may include teaching and support methods that have been developed to facilitate students' learning at a distance. On the other hand, the practical logic of agents (reasoning) is developed after their prolonged exposure to practical activities in the field and involves coping strategies that depend on the existing situation in the field. It is after much consideration of both the practices in the field and the logic of agents (students) that I arrived at a number of recommendations on how to improve practices in the academic field of the OUT which this study observed to have major deficiencies.

This chapter is divided into seven parts. The first part provides an introduction to the chapter while second part presents summary of the major findings of the study. The third discusses the logic of practice and focuses on practices in the rural, academic and domestic fields of the OUT and on the practices of agents. The fourth part provides recommendations for improving teaching and learning practices in rural Tanzania and is divided into three sub-sections: the OUT, the government and areas for further research. The fifth discusses the contributions of this study while the sixth presents its limitations. The final part concludes my study.

8.2 Major Findings of the Study

The following are among the major findings of this study:

1. Inadequate teaching and learning support systems at the OUT do not fully permit the necessary shift in students' habitus that is essential if students are to achieve mobility between the 'worlds' of the domestic, rural and academic fields I studied. The shift of habitus is particularly significant for those students whose initial educational background and practices were unlike those practised by distance education institutions. A shift of habitus would help such students to acquire a 'feel for the game' in the new field, adapt to the practices and sustain their studies. However, the poor conditions in the fields acted as limiting factors that inhibited the expected shift, and thus students were left feeling isolated and frustrated.

The inadequacies in the accessibility and availability of support services close to students' locations meant that they struggled to invest their economic, cultural and social capital. The capital accessed included networking with peers, graduates and private tutors within the region, as well as the acquisition of access to finance and learning resources. However, such access was not equally distributed among students. This, in itself, might endanger the quality of education available to each student, particularly with regard to the development of skills and knowledge.

2. In general, students have a conventional and mixed habitus which is not identical to the rules of the game of the OUT. In Chapter Five (section 5.2.2) I explained that students with conventional habitus are those who have advanced through the conventional system of education from lower primary school level to advanced secondary education level, and some beyond that to diploma level. On the other hand, students with mixed habitus are those who have experience of both conventional and non-conventional systems of education. By non-conventional education, I primarily mean acquiring an education through attending evening classes. In addition, students are also able to study privately without engaging in any educational system but need to apply to sit national examinations. Given such a variety of experiences, many students felt like 'fish out of water' and required support to acquire a feel for the game in distance education.

3. The extreme distances that exist between the rural areas where the students live and the OUT's urban located regional centres function as an expression and perpetuation of the rural–urban divide, a theme that is often discussed in the literature of developing countries. As relevant support services play a vital role in the education of rural students, it is not acceptable that these services are often inaccessible and unavailable.
4. Rural students incurred high economic costs in pursuing their education, many of which were unexpected. In principle, when compared to the conventional system of education, distance education is expected to be affordable (Keegan, 1990; Rumble, 1997; Daniel, 2007, 2010; Olakulehin and Panda, 2011; Krishnan, 2012). The costs incurred by students in this study were, however, inflated by the distance between the rural areas and the urban setting of the regional centres at which it was necessary for students to attend. Therefore, students had often to pay for accommodation and transport costs on the occasions they had to attend face-to-face sessions, tests, examinations or practical sessions.
5. The government's inadequacy to properly fund the OUT (a public University) appears to be one of the factors that restricts the OUT's provision of support services. Moreover, the government's inability to prioritise improvements to the rural technology infrastructure is holding back the real potential that distance education could offer to the country, especially as there is still a great need to widen access to higher education (BEST, 2011, 2012; ESDP, 2012).
6. The motivation for the sampled students in pursuing a degree at the OUT is purely an economic one as they see it as a means of improving their socio-economic status. Students have also social and academic motives for studying, although these are often seen as being less important (as explained in Chapter Five, section 5.3.2). It would certainly benefit students to widen the motives they have for studying as it would help them to fully develop the cognitive and social skills they need to eventually play key roles in society.

However, given the students' economic motives for pursuing a university education stated above, it is questionable whether all of these students are capable of overcoming the problems posed by the poor infrastructural conditions in the rural areas, and the limited access they have to the relevant support systems.

8.3 The Logic of Practice

With reference to the 'logic of practice', I found that the rural, academic and domestic fields do not accommodate the needs and interests of students. The fields are structured in a way that does not permit students the shift of habitus that is crucial for their transferability and adaptation, as students attempt to conform to the rules and principles of the game in the OUT's academic field.

The academic field of the OUT is expected to enable students to become independent and study at a distance without necessarily having to rely on tutors and peers. This is where the practices of the academic field need to be structured according to the purpose and functions of distance education as students are required to develop independence in learning and a readiness to assume their role as distance students. Therefore, the ability to develop and nurture independence in learning is an important one, especially as some students find it difficult to develop that skill without support of one form or another.

However, I found that students will continue to mix aspects of their former systems of education with the new practices in the fields. This is because the established structures of habitus are hard to erase and become active when students encounter practices similar to those of which they have previous experience. If the structure is different, then habitus uses practical logic to strategize and adapt to the field (Bourdieu, 1990). For example, the strategies used may be a combination of students' previous educational structures, exposure to the practices of the new field or even innovations beyond their past and present fields.

Therefore, the following question can legitimately be asked: what can be done to enable students to develop new structures (habitus) that are accommodating to the

new rules of the game? The data collected as part of this study suggest that the current urban locations of the OUT's regional centres will not facilitate the development of new habitus among students. Indeed, the location of these centres limits students' access to the relevant support services that are crucial for their development, and also perpetuates the existing rural-urban divide in Tanzania. Therefore, the OUT needs to urgently improve its teaching and support structures so that effective learning can be facilitated among its students, regardless of their locations.

Similarly, conditions in the rural and domestic fields do not help to facilitate the education of students in the academic field of the OUT. For example, students often experience challenges from employers and communities, and have socio-cultural and economic obligations within their families that distract them from their studies. Moreover, the rural environment in which they live appears insufficient to support the students in their learning because of the poor infrastructure and limited access to modern technology.

The conditions that existed in the fields caused students to utilise their cultural, economic and social capital to sustain their studies. Some continued to rely on the strategies and techniques that had supported their success in previous educational systems. For example, students used private tuition and group discussions and also exchanged knowledge and learning materials among each other in order to facilitate their studies. Unfortunately, the forms of capital needed were scarce, unsustainable and unequally distributed among students. This created tension and widened the gap between those students with means and access to resources and those without.

The experiences of students in this study differ from the practices expected in distance education, whereby support services are thought to be central to the education of students (Sewart, 1993; Lockwood, 1995; Rumble, 2000; Tait, 2000). In general, the operation of distance education is based on two sub-systems: namely, course development and support services. These two are not isolated but rather integrated to effectively facilitate teaching and learning practices at a distance.

The course development sub-system at the OUT is an appropriate one as it designs, produces and distributes printed course materials to students (Mhehe, 2002; OUT, 2011b, 2012a). However, the findings of this study reveal that less attention is directed towards the support service sub-system which is critical in bridging the physical and teaching gap that exists between students, tutors and their institutions. There is, therefore, a need to fill this gap and strengthen the relationship between the students (*habitus*) and their institution (*field*).

The OUT's provision of support services might enable students to experience a 'feel for the game' in the new field and subsequently develop structures that help them to survive in the field. The process of adaptation and a 'feel' for the game can be enhanced through orientation and induction sessions that help students to become familiar with the teaching and learning processes. In addition, the continuing provision of support services will help to sustain students in their studies and facilitate them in assuming their roles as independent distance learners.

Since the OUT is a public University, its endeavours to improve the teaching and learning support practices in rural Tanzania should be carried out in collaboration with the Government of Tanzania. Indeed, the vastness of the country, the uneven distribution of students, the poor rural infrastructure and the poor financial status of the OUT require the close scrutiny of the Government.

8.4 Recommendations

This section is divided into three main parts: recommendations to improve teaching and learning practices at the OUT; the call for government intervention; and the identification of areas for further research.

8.4.1 Recommendations for the OUT

1. Ensure accessibility and availability of support services among rural students

Support services are considered globally to play an integral part in the education of students and are critical factors in improving the quality of distance education (Rumble, 2000; Tait, 2000; Lentell, 2003; Dzakiria, 2005, 2008; Sharma, 2011;

Krishnan, 2012). As support services are central to facilitating students' learning in distance education, they must therefore be available and accessible, regardless of the students' geographical locations. The following suggestions can help to widen access to support among rural students in Tanzania:

- Establish well-developed study centres at the district level to facilitate learning within students' locations. This will help to address the problems of distance and isolation among students.
- Focus on time management and study skills to enable students to manage their studies and to also engage in socio-economic and cultural activities within rural and domestic fields.
- Provide guidance and counselling to guide students' learning and assist in addressing the emotional and financial challenges that confront students in rural areas.
- Improve tutor support, library services and Internet access at the regional centres.
- Improve face-to-face sessions to allow tutors to respond to the academic difficulties that students encounter in their studies. As explained in Chapter Five (section 5.4.1), the current practice pays more attention to the Students' Portfolio Assessment, whereby identified areas of students' academic difficulty are only recorded and no solution is provided.
- Utilise the available resources within regions. These include accessing learning resources and tutor support from existing private and public institutions in Tanzania. This may require a memorandum of understanding. In addition, available graduates in rural and urban areas can be asked to play the role of part-time tutors, this being normal practice in distance education. However, an induction course on distance education and the vetting of graduates' qualifications are important prerequisites in this regard so that the quality of teaching is not undermined.

- Provide up-to-date copies of printed materials and relevant reference books in district and regional national libraries.
- Arrange mobile services to facilitate tutor visits at the district level to address students' academic problems, such as: clarification on particularly difficult subject areas; the provision of academic guidance on course selection; and the supervision of practical sessions such as teaching practice. Tutor visits can also be valuable in offering guidance and counselling to students, in helping to reduce social, cultural and economic problems and in building up students' confidence.
- Explore the potential of using mobile phone services to access teaching support, send information and improve tutor-student interaction. An emphasis on reducing the cost of mobile phone services and in providing mobile phones that are learner-friendly should clearly be stipulated in the memorandum of understanding between the OUT and the selected mobile phone service provider.

2. Provide tutor support according to students' area of degree specialization

There is a severe shortage of tutors in a number of areas of degree specialization in the sampled regional centres. The inadequacies were seen in law, political science and science courses.

3. Ensure flexibility in scheduled university events, activities and programmes in order to accommodate the multiple social, economic, cultural and academic needs of students.

The scheduled activities at the OUT (such as tests, examinations, face-to-face and practical sessions) take up much of the students' time as these sessions are fixed in their practice. Unfortunately, once missed, there is no opportunity to re-take the sessions and so students have to wait until the start of the new academic year to take part in these important events. Such rigidity of practice affects students' ability to participate in the other socio-economic activities that are one of the

main purposes of learning by distance education. Therefore, if the OUT is to continue to sustain the motivation of mature students who have voluntarily decided to study with them, then they must provide a flexible schedule that would allow students to learn while meeting their other commitments.

4. Apply blended learning to improve teaching and learning support

The infrastructural and technological status of Tanzania limits the effective use of media in teaching and supporting learning among rural students (URT, 2011b). It is presently the case in Tanzania that the process of delivery of online services in teaching and learning not yet widely accessible among rural students. However, it is important to continue to make progress in this area so that Tanzanian distance education practices will eventually become better aligned with global practices. This is also where the idea of utilising blended learning becomes relevant. As stated earlier, blended learning combines the application of technology and traditional means of providing education. Such a system, therefore, can use online resources and at the same time encourage the use of radio, television, telephone, face-to-face sessions, printed copies of study materials and recorded tutorials or lectures in the form of videos, audio tapes and CDs.

At present, however, the OUT does not utilise radio, television, audio cassettes, tutorials or the use of audio and video conferencing at its regional and study centres, although these aids are used by other Distance Education Universities in developing countries (Sukumar, 2001; Chandar and Sharma, 2003; Nonyongo, 2003; Ukpo, 2006; Nonyongo and Ngegebule, 2008; Aderinoye et al, 2009; Chandran, 2011; Sharma, 2011, Krishnan, 2012).

5. The OUT needs to reflect the purpose of universities globally

In Chapter Three, section 3.3, I discussed the functions of the OUT in relation to the stated functions and purposes of universities throughout the world. In doing so, I adopted Barnett's (1992) distinction between the system view and the students view. The system view focuses on functions such as developing human capital to suit the labour market in the social world, improving people's life

chances by widening access to education to the majority of the people and developing research careers. The students view looks at individual development in terms of critical commentary and intellectual enquiry skills, autonomy in learning and the development of students' personal characteristics.

However, the functions of the OUT appear to concentrate on the system view, which mainly focuses on functions that are external to the university (refer to section 3.3.1). However striking a balance between the two views is important given that the social world needs people who are intellectually sound and who possess the critical faculties to challenge the existing socio-economic practices of the day. In addition, such graduates could also help to develop the social, economic, cultural and political spheres of society. It is, therefore, clear that the OUT should consider both perspectives and have a clear critical sense of how it is positioned in its application of vision, mission and functions.

8.4.2 Recommendations for the Government

1. Improve the financial status of the OUT so that it can expand its teaching and learning support systems to students who live in geographically remote rural areas

The OUT is a public University and its functioning is dependent to a large extent on the financial support provided by the government of Tanzania. To date, statistics and studies conducted at the OUT indicate that the University is inadequately funded (OUT, 2009a, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2013; Kolimba et al, 2012; Kazungu and Mbwette, 2012).

The inadequate funding of the OUT seriously limits its ability to provide support services that are available and accessible to the majority of students, and also hinders those particular teaching practices that require the employment of sophisticated media such as online services. This impacts most on those students who live in the remote rural areas of Tanzania, where the country's lack of modern infrastructure impedes the accessibility of educational resources.

If greater financial support were given to the OUT, then it is more likely to appropriately support marginalised rural students. This could be done by improving practices at the existing regional centres and by establishing well-equipped study centres at the district level with adequate physical and human resources.

The findings in Chapter Seven (section 7.4.3) demonstrate the availability of a number of former graduates of the OUT, and of other conventional universities, who live in the rural areas and who could liaise with other tutors from colleges and universities in the region. These graduates could serve as part-time tutors employed by the OUT once suitable training and vetting of their qualifications has been carried out. The OUT could then run tutor development and training workshops to familiarise the new tutors with the teaching, learning and support practices of the OUT. The University of South Africa also operates such a system (UNISA) (Nonyongo and Ngengebule, 2008).

The emphasis on using part-time tutors would not be a new practice in Tanzania as it is widely used in many Distance Education Universities such as UNISA and OUUK, both of which have long experience in the practice of distance education (Tait, 2002; Shelley et al, 2006; Fouche, 2006). Improving the provision of human and physical resources, therefore, would help to reduce the existing gap between rural and urban areas in accessing resources and also ensure that support services are available and accessible to students, regardless of their geographical locations.

2. Improve the existing technological infrastructure in rural Tanzania

This study has recorded the problems of students regarding Tanzania's poor technology and infrastructure. The situation has also been recorded in government documents (URT, 2001, 2005, 2011b) to date, there are still changes in addressing this problem. Nevertheless, if improvements were made in rural access to technology (the Internet) and infrastructure (roads and electricity), then the development of a knowledge society – which is among the goals of Tanzania Vision 2025 and the Tanzania Five Year Development Plan (2011/2012-2015/16

(URT, 1998, 2011b) – would become a more feasible prospect. Such improvements would enable the OUT to harness the potential benefits associated with the use of technology in education and be able to support students within their locations.

8.4.3 Recommendations for Future Research

1. Inadequate access to relevant support services and the poor learning environment in rural areas is likely to impede the effective development of students' intellectual and critical commentary skills. However, methods for developing individual intellectual and critical commentary skills were not central to my study and hence this study did not yield any evidence to support this assumption. A future study could examine whether the development of intellectual and critical commentary skills is indeed affected by the level of study support provided, and the findings from such a study could usefully inform recommendations to improve the practice of distance education in rural areas.
2. Similarly, a follow-up (tracer) study could also be conducted to assess rural students' post-study trajectories in their communities and workplaces. Particularly appropriate would be a longitudinal study where the socio-economic status of students is observed during the course of their studies and again once they have completed them. The purpose would be to see whether the education they received has had any impact on their lives. The findings may provide insights on the skills, competencies and knowledge that are most required by students and what forms of support and teaching strategies are required to facilitate the process. In addition, a further study could help to assess whether the OUT has brought about significant changes in the lives of particular students and to determine what these changes are and what their effect has been.
3. Some of the data from this study show that students have different needs according to their degree area of specialisation. Earlier I argued for an improvement in the extent to which support is accessible and available to students, regardless of their area of specialisation. A future study could be directed towards understanding the specific support required by students in their

particular area of specialisation. This would help to map the needs of students according to their specialisation and hence enable the OUT to develop effective support mechanisms that would address students' subject-specific needs and improve their study experiences.

4. The findings of the current study may be transferable and applicable to areas with characteristics similar to those found in rural Tanzania. To achieve a greater degree of generalizability in the findings (in the context of developing countries), a future study could also employ quantitative methods to study students' experiences in rural areas. The qualitative methods adopted in this study have helped to discover issues that cannot be generalised as they are context-based and focused on a small number of sampled students. Rather than focusing on the nature of the experience or on 'how' and 'why', quantitative methods would give an indication of 'how many' or 'how much'. It would be interesting, therefore, to design a quantitative study based on the findings of this present research to explore the extent to which the findings apply to other distance education contexts within and beyond Tanzania.
5. The students' support needs discussed in this study were arranged according to the frequency with which they were raised by students in the interviews. The types of support that were asked for most frequently were tutor support, the establishment of study centres and the provision of study materials. The least mentioned support needs were study skills, group discussions and computer skills. Perhaps a consideration of a larger group of student would have rendered rather different results. A future study, therefore, might explore students' support needs but include a large number of students.
6. This current study revealed that rural Tanzania is faced with infrastructural challenges which limit the effective use of technology in facilitating teaching and learning support among students. These limitations were mainly associated with inadequate access to electricity, the high costs of internet services and the lack of technical expertise among students. Therefore, a further exploration of the types of technology that would enable students to learn, interact and access relevant

support while taking into account the existing challenges in rural areas would be greatly appreciated.

7. One of the significant finding of this study revealed the differences in gender roles performed by students in the domestic field and the associated challenges students then had to face. Because of this, we now know more about the experiences of male students in the domestic field – an area of research which had been under-represented in the body of literature on developing countries. It might prove very useful, therefore, if an in-depth study could be undertaken that would explore male students' experiences in all three identified social spaces (i.e. the rural, domestic and academic fields) so that relevant issues related to teaching and learning support could be more thoroughly considered.
8. This study adopted Bourdieu's conceptual terms of habitus and field to explore and describe rural students' experiences at the Open University of Tanzania. The use of concepts was mostly grounded in the methodological application of terms rather than in their philosophical application. Therefore, a further study could consider the rural students' experiences in relation to the philosophical application of terms and thus help to disclose the existing tensions and power relationships in play when accessing academic and non-academic support services. In addition, issues of inequality, class, and social and cultural reproduction could also be another area of focus.

8.5 Contributions of the Study

This section discusses the contribution of this study to the body of literature on developing countries, to the Open University of Tanzania and to the country of Tanzania.

1. The findings of this study help to address the literature gap on students' experiences of teaching and support systems in rural developing countries. This was achieved through the use the theoretical concepts of habitus and fields which enabled the mapping of rural students' experiences at the Open University of Tanzania. The theoretical concepts provided the chance to reflect holistically on

the challenges that students faced in the rural, domestic and academic fields of the OUT. This helped to draw a broader picture of students' experiences than is typically featured in the literature on developing countries.

2. Most of the previous studies conducted in the field of distance education focused on female students, while the experiences of male students were under-represented. One contribution my study makes, therefore, is to take account of the challenges experienced by male students in the rural context. Specifically, this study reflected on gendered roles in the domestic field and found that male students also experience difficulties in studying at a distance, primarily because they have various other competing roles to fulfil at home and in their workplace.

Nonetheless, my study revealed that it was the female students who experienced more challenges in their homes than the male students did, and this despite the fact that some male students were involved in taking care of their children. This situation was made worse by the lack of any type of sophisticated technology that would have reduced the burden of their domestic chores. As these women lacked tap water within their homes, they had to fetch water from outside, cook using firewood and charcoal, and wash and clean their homes by hand. To carry out these tasks, they had to get up early and go to bed late, unlike the male students.

Having noted these differences in role obligations, it should be apparent that both male and female students require access to appropriate support systems that would help them to succeed in their academic studies, and at the same time enable them to fulfil their responsibilities as parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, sisters, brothers and community members.

3. The finding that rural students have a conventional and mixed habitus helps us to understand why these students often have an orientation that is different from the teaching and learning practices of most distance education students. Moreover, their rural habitus and the communal life they are involved in within their rural areas often requires them to actively participate in cultural and community activities such as burial ceremonies, weddings, traditional dances, village meetings, village development plans and traditional ceremonies such as initiation

and circumcision ceremonies. These issues are less frequently discussed in the literature, but they take up a lot of the time that students might have set aside for study. Much thought is required, therefore, to find ways that will enable students to develop study skills and manage their studies while fulfilling their local obligations.

4. In Chapter Three (section 3.4.4), it was observed that most of the research in distance education has used survey and case study approaches. The present study was innovative in that it followed an ethnographic approach in studying students' experiences in the rural areas. The choice of ethnography as a methodological approach allowed me to use multiple research methods that required my long exposure to the field. In addition to observation, I used documents such as diaries (for use as journals) which were kept by students for a period of six months. Both methods – diaries and observations – allowed me to explore the students' experiences on a day-to-day basis. Such a method would not normally be preferred due to the fact that conducting observations on distance students in rural areas is difficult. This study, however, proved that ethnography is possible in distance education although it requires a certain degree of innovation to generate rich and contextual data.
5. The findings of this study may also help to improve access to higher education for the 80% of Tanzanians who reside in rural locations. In fact, access to higher education in Tanzania is documented to stand at only 1% (BEST, 2011, 2012). Therefore, widening access to higher education for the majority of Tanzanians is important. The study's findings on students' experiences in rural Tanzania can prove instrumental in improving the teaching and learning support practices at the OUT, and in the rural communities. As a result, more promising opportunities can be offered to the rural majority in Tanzania, whose present access to higher education is minimal (Ishengoma, 2008; URT, 2011b; Kolimba et al, 2012).
6. This study has also demonstrated that research is central to identifying the practical challenges that confront both the rural students and the OUT. It is my hope that the present study has demonstrated its capacity to inform and thus to

help improve the teaching and support practices of the OUT and more importantly to the learning experiences of students in rural Tanzania. Such changes will help to improve the quality of education provided by the OUT which this study observed to be at stake. Changes in the quality of education may also have an impact on the quality of the OUT students who graduate from the University.

8.6 Limitations of the Study

As this study sampled only twenty four students from rural areas, I cannot claim that this sample is representative of the majority of students. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be suitable for generalisation, although the detail or thick description I provided in my study may deem them transferable and applicable to other rural areas in developing countries with similar characteristics to Tanzania. This study may also be liable to bias as I was the only one involved with the generation of data, analysis and discussion. However, I ensured throughout that I documented all the processes and inductively used participants' quotes to guide the discussions.

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the main findings of the study and on the proposed areas for improvement as well as future research. The findings demonstrate that there is an urgent need to ensure accessibility to support services in the rural areas. However, the fact that regional centres and the availability of learning resources are currently located in urban locations perpetuates the rural-urban divide among students at the OUT. Because of this, rural students experience great difficulties in accessing relevant support within their areas, unlike their colleagues in urban areas. The situation has also been made worse by the government's inability to financially empower the OUT and to improve rural technology and infrastructure.

Indeed, less attention seems to have been paid to improving the rural infrastructure and the technological needs of the rural Tanzanian people. Such inaction has an impact on the teaching and learning practices of the OUT as these are principally

media-based. The inadequacy in infrastructure and technological development at the OUT is likely to limit the ability of students to adapt to the teaching and learning practices that are essential to their development, especially if we consider their past educational experiences.

The central aim of the OUT should be to prepare a suitable environment that will enable students to study successfully so that they can attain their socio-economic goals which, after all, influenced their decision to pursue a university degree at the OUT in the first place. On the other hand, the role of government is to ensure that the OUT is financially stable, and that the infrastructure and technology in rural areas are improved so that the OUT can operate as a fully-fledged university that Tanzania can be proud of.

In this chapter, I have also highlighted the need for the OUT to observe the broader purpose of universities globally. It has been suggested that the purpose or function of universities is to: develop experienced human capital; develop research careers; widen access to education; develop students' intellectual abilities and critical commentary skills so that they can make informed choices and decisions; and to develop or prepare responsible citizens (e.g Barnett, 1992, 2011; Kreber, 2009, 2013; Biesta, 2011; Collin, 2012).

However, the documented functions of the OUT (OUT, 2011b: 64) seem to place less emphasis on the development of students, and focus much more on those functions that are external to the university namely the development of human capital (see section 3.3.1) While these functions are important, the loss of focus on students' development may jeopardise the reputation of the university and endanger the quality of graduates produced. Although the OUT's internal and external roles are extremely important, it is also the case that financial support from the government is an absolute necessity. Therefore, the government must acquire the necessary political will to fund the OUT (a public University) so that it can achieve its true educational potential in Tanzania.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Form

Title: Rural Students' Experiences at the Open University of Tanzania

Introduction

I am a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom. I am doing an ethnographic study on rural students' experiences at the Open University of Tanzania. I have purposefully sampled four regional centres of the OUT which are distantly located from the headquarters. The conduct of this study will take eight months and it will include students, tutors, regional directors and OUT's top officials. The purpose of the study is to explore and provide thick descriptions on the experiences of rural students of the Open University of Tanzania and reflect on the implications of their experiences on matters related to support services. Your cooperation and active engagement in this study is highly appreciated as it is central to its success.

Consent agreement

This is a consent form developed by an interviewer with the aim of ensuring that you are fully aware of the main purposes of this study and you are willing to participate as one of the selected research participants. The signing of this consent form indicates your agreement and readiness to share your experiences related to the needs of this study. However, I have indicated in one of the statements below that you are free to withdraw your consent at any time. I promise to provide the transcribed interview sheets for verification of our discussion and leave you with a copy of the informed consent form.

If you have any queries, questions or contributions related to your involvement in this study or regarding improvement, please contact me through my email lulusimon3@gmail.com or mobile number 0784900511. Your identity, questions, and concerns will be kept confidential.

Please tick the statements you agree with. Please also make sure you write the date and sign your name.

1. I understand that this is an academic study and I am only considered as a participant.
2. I clearly understand the purpose of this study and I am allowed to raise queries about it at any time.
3. I am willing to participate in interview sessions in this study.
4. I am willing to be recorded during interview sessions and the recorded information will only be used for the benefits of this study.
5. I understand that no picture or image will be taken and used without my permission.
6. I understand my name will not appear in any published document related to this study but rather the researcher will use pseudo names to maintain my identity and will not breach any confidentiality.

7. I allow the researcher to use excerpts from the interview for publication without disclosing my identity.
8. I am willing to take part in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am allowed to withdraw consent regarding my involvement at any time.

Interviewee

Signature.....

Date.....

Interviewer

Signature.....

Date.....

Appendix 2: Permission Letters



UNIVERSITY OF DAR-ES-SALAAM
OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR
P.O. BOX 35091 ♦ DAR ES SALAAM ♦ TANZANIA

Ref.No: AB3/12(B)
Date: 20th November, 2010
To: The Vice-Chancellor,
Open University of Tanzania,
Dar es Salaam

UNIVERSITY STAFF AND STUDENTS RESEARCH CLEARANCE

The purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Ms Lulu Mahai** who is a bonafide staff of the University of Dar es Salaam and who is at the moment conducting research. Our staff members and students undertake research activities every year especially during the long vacation.

In accordance with a government circular letter Ref.No.MPEC/R/10/1 dated 4th July, 1980 the Vice-Chancellor was empowered to issue research clearances to the staff and students of the University of Dar es Salaam on behalf of the government and the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, a successor organization to UTAFITI.

I therefore request you to grant the above-mentioned member of our University community any help that may facilitate her to achieve research objectives. What is required is your permission for her to see and talk to the leaders and members of your institutions in connection with her research.

The title of the research in question is **"Experiences of Rural Students of the Open University of Tanzania: Implications for Support Services"**.

The period for which this permission has been granted is **November, 2010 to June, 2011** and will cover the following areas/offices: **Open University of Tanzania**

Should some of these areas/offices be restricted, you are requested to kindly advise her as to which alternative areas/offices could be visited. In case you may require further information, please contact the Directorate of Research, Tel. 2410500-8 Ext. 2087 or 2410743.


Prof. Rwekaza S. Mukandala
VICE-CHANCELLOR

VICE CHANCELLOR
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Ref. No. OUT / RCL/VOL.II/2

10/12/2011

To whom it may concern,

The Open University of Tanzania

RE: RESEARCH CLEARANCE

This is to certify/inform that **Ms. Lulu Mahai** has been granted permission to conduct research on "Experience of Rural Students of The Open University of Tanzania; Implications for support services".

This permission allows her to see and talk to the students, leaders and members of staff of The Open University of Tanzania in connection with her research.

This is in accordance with the Government Circular letter Ref. No. MPEC/R/10/1 dated 4th July 1980, the Vice Chancellor was empowered to issue research clearance to the staff and students of the University on behalf of the Government and the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, a successor organization to UTAFIT.

This permission is granted for the period of 7 months from December to June, 2011 covering areas/offices of The Open University of Tanzania.

Yours Sincerely,

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF TANZANIA


R. Musika

For: Deputy Vice Chancellor (Resources Management)

c.c: Vice Chancellor
DVC (Academic)
DVC (Regional Services) – will be visiting Ruvuma, Mtwara, Tabora, Mwanza,
Kagera and Rukwa